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Whooper Swan, Hogganfield Loch, Clyde, January 2018. © *Iain Leach*

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Scottish Birds is the quarterly journal for SOC members, and is published in March, June, September and December annually.

Containing original papers relating to ornithology in Scotland, topical articles, bird observations, reports of rare and scarce bird sightings, alongside branch and Club-related news, our members tell us that *Scottish Birds* is one of the key benefits of belonging to the SOC. Its different sections have been developed to meet the wide needs of the birdwatching community, and the publication is renowned for its first-class photography.

An archive of the journal is available on the SOC website, where links can be found to other Club publications including the *Scottish Bird Report* online.

More about the SOC...

On the one hand, a birdwatching club. Established in 1936, the Scottish Ornithologists' Club (SOC) is Scotland's bird club with 15 branches around the country and a growing membership of over 3,000. Through a programme of talks, outings, conferences and other events, it brings together like-minded individuals with a passion for birds, nature and conservation.

On the other, a network of volunteers across Scotland, gathering vital, impartial information about our wild birds. The data we collect is made available to conservationists, planners and developers, and is used by organisations such as the RSPB, as one of the first points of reference in informed conservation planning.

Club Headquarters can be found at Waterston House, Aberlady, overlooking the scenic local nature reserve. Housed within, is the George Waterston Library, the largest ornithological library in Scotland, and the Donald Watson Gallery - one of the jewels in the Waterston House crown, exhibiting wildlife art all year-round.

Join us...

As well as receiving *Scottish Birds* every quarter, SOC members have access to a programme of talks and outings across Scotland and affiliation to a local branch of the Club. New members will receive a welcome pack on joining, plus a thank you gift if paying their subscription by direct debit.

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Plate 1. James Main, Musselburgh, Lothian, January 2018. © *Doreen Main*

President's Foreword

The new and greatly improved SOC website is now live! I am sure you will agree with me that this is a great step forward. Jane Cleaver is to be congratulated for her huge effort and tenacity in seeing this through to fruition.

As I write this, the team behind the latest local atlas, *Birds in South-East Scotland*, is finalising its analyses, species accounts, maps and all that is involved with its production. Following extensive fieldwork, there has been a prodigious amount of effort put into the project and I for one am certainly looking forward to getting a copy. The atlas is dedicated to the late Ray Murray, a past President of the SOC and a major moving force behind this and the previous atlas. I commend this new tome, which now includes breeding and wintering birds and is sure to enhance your birdwatching opportunities in this part of the world.

We are looking forward to the 2018 Scottish Birdwatchers' Conference on 17 March at the SRUC Barony Campus, Parkgate, Dumfries. This year's programme is entitled "Donald Watson Centenary Special: a celebration of the Birds of Dumfries and Galloway." Thanks to SOC Dumfries Branch, BTO Scotland and staff at Waterston House for all their hard work in organising this event.

The winter is now well upon us but, even in January, we have not had any really hard weather in the South-East of Scotland. What we have had is an influx of Hawfinches, which are normally very rare but they have been appearing in a few unusual places and in one of their old habitats - the Hirsel at Coldstream in the Borders.

As in the past four years, the SOC and the Isle of May Bird Observatory will be running a Young Birders' Training Course in July 2018. This course has proved most popular and will once again sponsor six enthusiastic young birders to stay at the observatory for a week to learn ringing and ornithological skills.

As is mentioned in the news and notices section, Dave Allan, Events Coordinator at Waterston House, retires at the end of March after 13 years of service. Dave has been a stalwart of the Club over that time and has organised highly successful art exhibitions as well as year-round guided walks for beginners. This has brought in new members and much more. He will be missed - especially by the regular weekend visitors! Best wishes to Dave and his wife Alison in their retirement.

Best wishes to everyone for 2018 - and good birding!

James Main, SOC President

Seabird population trends on the Shiant Isles, Outer Hebrides, 2000–15

P. R. TAYLOR, R. MACMINN, S. MARSH, M. DE L. BROOKE, M. MACDONALD, P. HUGHES, F. DONALD, H. DOCHERTY, A. OVER, J. BEATON, D. SCRIDEL, L. ROBERTSON & N. CURRIE

The Shiant Isles host one of Scotland's most important seabird colonies and are designated a Special Protection Area. Ahead of a Black Rat eradication on the islands undertaken during the winter of 2015/16, a full census of the seabird population was undertaken to establish a baseline from which any changes could be assessed.

The census was undertaken between 13 and 22 June 2015. The survey team conducted counts from land or sea using standard methodologies to derive a total pre-eradication baseline seabird population for the Isles. Population trends since 1999–2000, the date of the last full census, vary significantly between species. Fulmar, Guillemot and Kittiwake have suffered significant decreases, of 65%, 45% and 46% respectively, over these 15 years. This has been particularly marked for Kittiwake and Guillemot on some of the individual islands. On the other hand, Shag, Puffin and Razorbill populations on the islands appear to have been relatively stable. The Great Skua population has increased by 46% since 2000.

Introduction

Globally, seabirds are the fastest declining group of birds (Croxall *et al.* 2012). This is reflected in Scotland where many Scottish seabird populations are suffering significant and long-term declines (JNCC, 2015). The declines have been attributed to a range of factors, including oceanographic changes related to climate change, changes in fisheries policy, severe weather events, increase in generalist predators and presence of invasive, non-native predators (Votier *et al.* 2004, Wanless *et al.* 2007, JNCC 2015). To better understand these declines, their drivers and possible remedies we need to properly monitor seabird populations.

The Shiant Isles are one of the most important seabird colonies in Scotland, hosting around 10% of British and Irish Puffins *Fratercula arctica*, 7% of Razorbills *Alca torda* and 1.8% of Shags *Phalacrocorax aristotelis* (Brooke *et al.* 2002, Mitchell *et al.* 2004). The presence of a Manx Shearwater *Puffinus puffinus* bone in archaeological remains and preferred habitat for Storm Petrels *Hydrobates pelagicus* suggest that both Manx Shearwater and Storm Petrels may have once bred on the islands. However, neither species has been recorded breeding, though Storm Petrels with brood patches were captured in mist nets on the islands in 1971 (Brooke 1973). The lack of petrels is likely linked to the Shiants population of Black Rats *Rattus rattus,* known predators of eggs and chicks (Stapp 2002, Towns *et al.* 2006). Black Rats are believed to have arrived on the islands in the 18th century. The RSPB led an EU LIFE+ Project that undertook an island restoration project to remove the population of black rats from the islands through an eradication done during the winter of 2015/16.

We undertook a comprehensive count of the islands' seabirds to provide an estimated total population and understand seabird population trends. We also aimed to establish a population estimate prior to the eradication of rats, so that this can be used as a baseline figure in future studies. We visited the islands from 13 to 22 June 2015. This work has been complemented by seabird productivity estimates calculated by RSPB monitoring team, but this work will not be presented here.

Survey site

The Shiant Isles (12 in number) lie east of the Isle of Harris (Outer Hebrides) and are composed of three main islands: Garbh Eilean, Eilean an Tighe and Eilean Mhuire (Figure 1). To the west, there is a short chain of islets and sea stacks called the Galtachan, the two most prominent being Galta Mor (to the west) and Galta Beag (to the east). Garbh Eilean and Eilean an Tighe are dolerite intrusions and are poorly drained with acidic soils and are joined by a short tidal isthmus. The north and east slopes of Garbh Eilean hold two very large boulder screes that sit under large cliffs. These boulder fields hold a significant percentage of the auk and Shag populations and present a significant challenge to completing a population census (Figure 2). Eilean Mhuire is mainly composed of softer sedimentary rock with deeper and more fertile soil. There are steep cliffs on its north-eastern coast and steep grass slopes on its southern and western coasts. The abundance of rats on the islands is not well known but there were estimated to be around 3,500 in spring 2012. This population is thought to peak in the summer months (WMIL 2013).

Survey Methods

Razorbill, Guillemot, Shag, Kittiwake, Fulmar, Puffin, Great Skua and three species of gulls were surveyed. Surveys were performed following standard Seabird Census Monitoring techniques (hereinafter 'CSM'; Walsh *et al.* 1995) apart from in the boulder colonies where we applied an adapted approach, explained below. All surveys (terrestrial and from boat) occurred between 09:00 and 17:30 BST from 15 to 22 June 2015, during calm weather, with a flat sea and good visibility. To facilitate the counts, we firstly divided the Shiant Isles SPA by individual island and subsequently by individual subplots (Figure 1). Subplots were coded based on the island's initials, GE for Garbh Eilean, EM for Eilean Mhuire, ET for Eilean an Tighe, and numerically, clockwise from the east, and split where there was an obvious geographic break, or break between colonies. Where previous surveys of the island have used a different coding for the Puffin population, we brought the Puffin colonies within this subplot coding to make the results conform with SNH Site Condition Monitoring approaches.

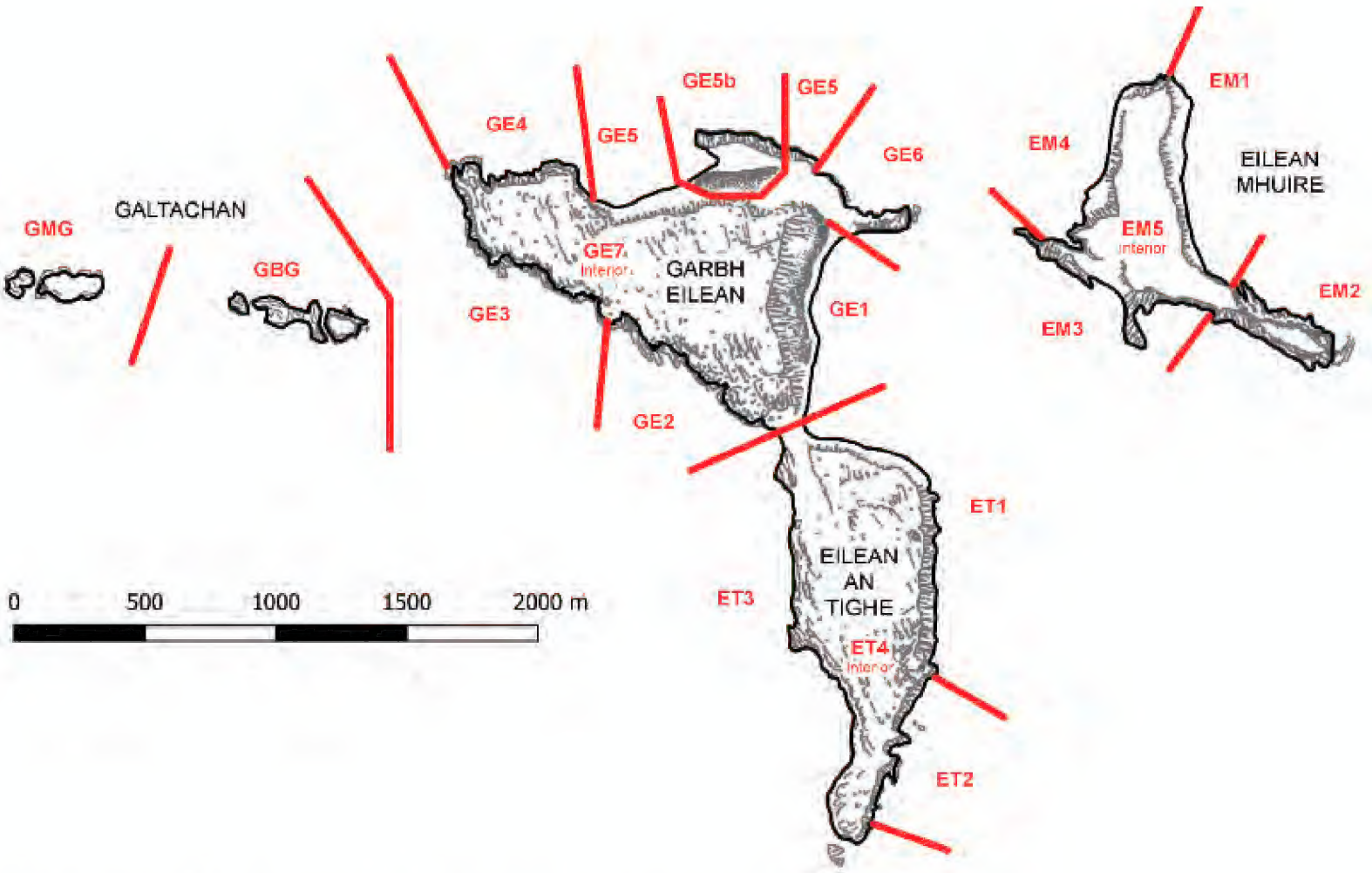

Figure 1. Map of Shiant Isles SPA showing census subplots and subplot codes.

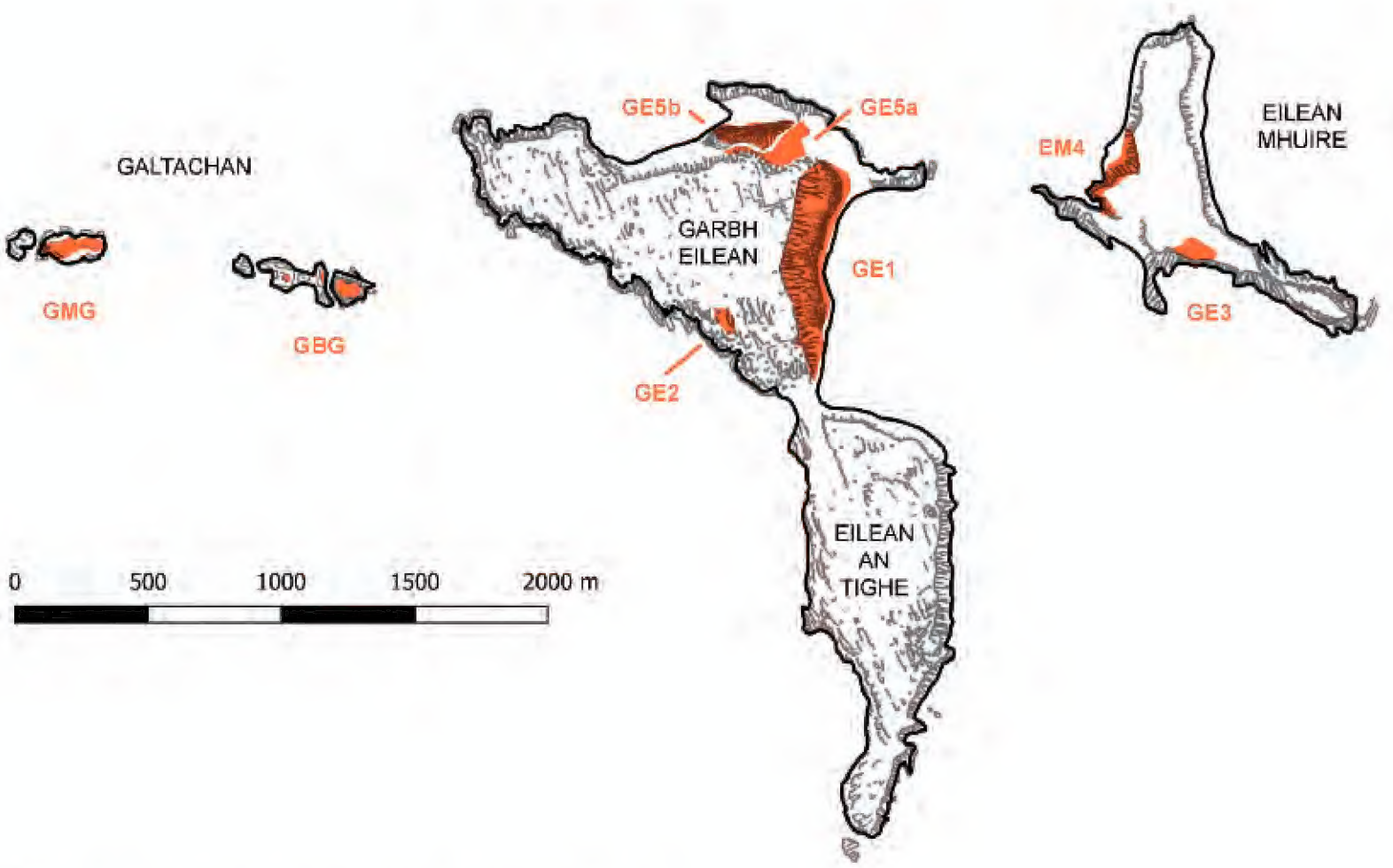

Figure 2. Puffin colonies within the Shiant Isles SPA 2015.

The cliff-nesting species (Fulmar, Guillemot, Kittiwake and Razorbill) that were present in each subplot other than GE1 and GE5b (the boulder fields) were counted by pairs of experienced surveyors from vantage points on land, or were counted from the sea using the SNH rigid inflatable boat 'Mustella V', where conditions allowed. Where surveyors identified a part of the subsection that could not be reliably surveyed from land, the same surveyors finalised that subsection count from the boat within 24 hours of the shore-based count. As with all boat-based counts, care was required to ensure results were not affected by disturbance (temporary colony abandonment). For each subplot, the number of Apparently Occupied Sites (AOS) or individuals (IND) was counted following CSM recommendations.

Ground-nesting gulls (Lesser Black-backed Gull *Larus fuscus*, Great Black-backed Gull *L. marinus*, Herring Gull *L. argentatus* and Common Gulls *L. canus*) and Great Skua *Stercorarius skua* were counted by walking systematically across the interior of Garbh Eilean (GE7), Eilean an Tighe (ET4) and Eilean Mhuire (EM5) recording established territories and nest contents.

Adapted methods

Obtaining estimates for Puffins on the Shiant Isles is particularly difficult given the terrain, complex habitat and sheer number of birds. We used an unrestricted random sampling technique (method 1) following Gilbert *et al.* (1998), to estimate the number of Apparently Occupied Burrows (AOB) in those Puffin colonies that could be readily accessed by our survey team: GE5a, EM3, GMG and GBG. For those inaccessible colonies, including the key boulder field sites, we used another approach devised by Brooke (1972) (method 2) that derives an estimate of AOBs for the colony by comparing attendant or standing birds within that colony with a nearby reference plot where the number of AOBs has been calculated using method 1 (unrestricted random sampling). Method 2 was used to estimate Puffin AOBs in colonies GE1, GE5b, GE2 and EM4. A comparison of the Puffin colonies we report and those presented by Brooke (1972) is given in the Appendix.

In colonies GE5a and EM3, we randomly selected 20 5×5m plots within which two observers counted the number of AOB following CSM techniques. In GMG, the same approach was taken, however, only 18 quadrats were surveyed and we used a 20 m^2 circular quadrat instead, due to space and access constraints. The method produced an average density of AOBs per square metre in each colony. The area of each colony was established by surveying the perimeter with a Garmin 62s GPS and then using that device's area calculation function. This allows for an estimated number of total AOBs to be derived for the colony. The method works particularly well in colonies within which the density of AOBs does not vary markedly.

The boulder field colonies represented a significant challenge, with access and the identification of individual 'burrows' proving extremely difficult. The complex topography of the boulder field colonies and the large number of birds present, combined to make a direct count of AOBs within a quadrat impossible. Therefore, method 1 was not suitable for undertaking a census of colonies GE1, GE2 or GE5b, instead we undertook method 2 in these areas. We used the most visible, easily accessed part of colony GE5a, subplot Gi (Brooke 1972), to estimate the ratio of standing birds to AOB at that time (Figure 3). We did not use the whole of colony GE5a because it could not all be viewed from one vantage point. We then counted the number of standing birds in GE1, GE2 and GE5b, and applied this standing bird to AOB ratio obtained in GE5a subplot Gi to estimate the number of AOB at the other colonies.

Photography was used to help make an accurate count of the very large number of standing birds. Surveyors avoided counting during periods of significant disturbance (e.g. by flying eagles), which would clearly impact results. At least 20 minutes should elapse before a count is undertaken after a disturbance event.

Using a 60x optical zoom camera, photography of standing birds in GE5b was done at 10:30 on 17 June 2015, from the rock outcrops to the north of the colony. Photos of subplot Gi (Brooke 1972) were taken at the same time. Photography of standing birds in GE1 was done at 11:00 on 21 June 2015 using the same equipment from a boat positioned around 50 m from shore. Ten minutes later, photographs were taken of subplot Gi, again from a boat positioned around 50 m from the shore. The series of photographs from each colony and on each occasion were later 'stitched' together using the Photomerge Tool in Adobe Photoshop CS6 to build a complete colony image. This ensured that no double counting occurred. Attendant Puffins (and Razorbills) were then counted using the Count Tool within the same software. Because of the size of the colonies and consequent file size of images, we split the colony into several sections that were counted individually.

To ensure accuracy, the counts from one section were repeated by two independent counters. Totals differed by less than 3% for each section, leading us to accept the count as accurate.

Similar difficulties were encountered in colony EM4, which, although grassy, was too steep to allow access for survey without ropes. Here the colony at EM3 was used to calibrate the attendant bird to AOB ratio. A series of photographs were taken from the boat positioned approximately 50 m from the shore at EM4 at 11:00 on 18 July. Within 15 minutes of completion, two surveyors were put ashore on a skerry opposite the colony at EM3 (grid reference NG43159813) to undertake a count of standing birds where method 1 had already been applied.

The attendant Puffins occupying the small colony at GE2 were counted by eye from above on 17 June. Ideally, it would have been counted on 21 June to most closely replicate the prevailing conditions in GE5b when the ratio was calculated for GE5, but due to time constraints this was not possible. Although this is a weakness in the methodology the relatively small scale of the colony (less than 2% of the total population) means that the estimated AOBs for GE2 are unlikely to significantly skew the total figure for Puffin AOBs within the SPA.

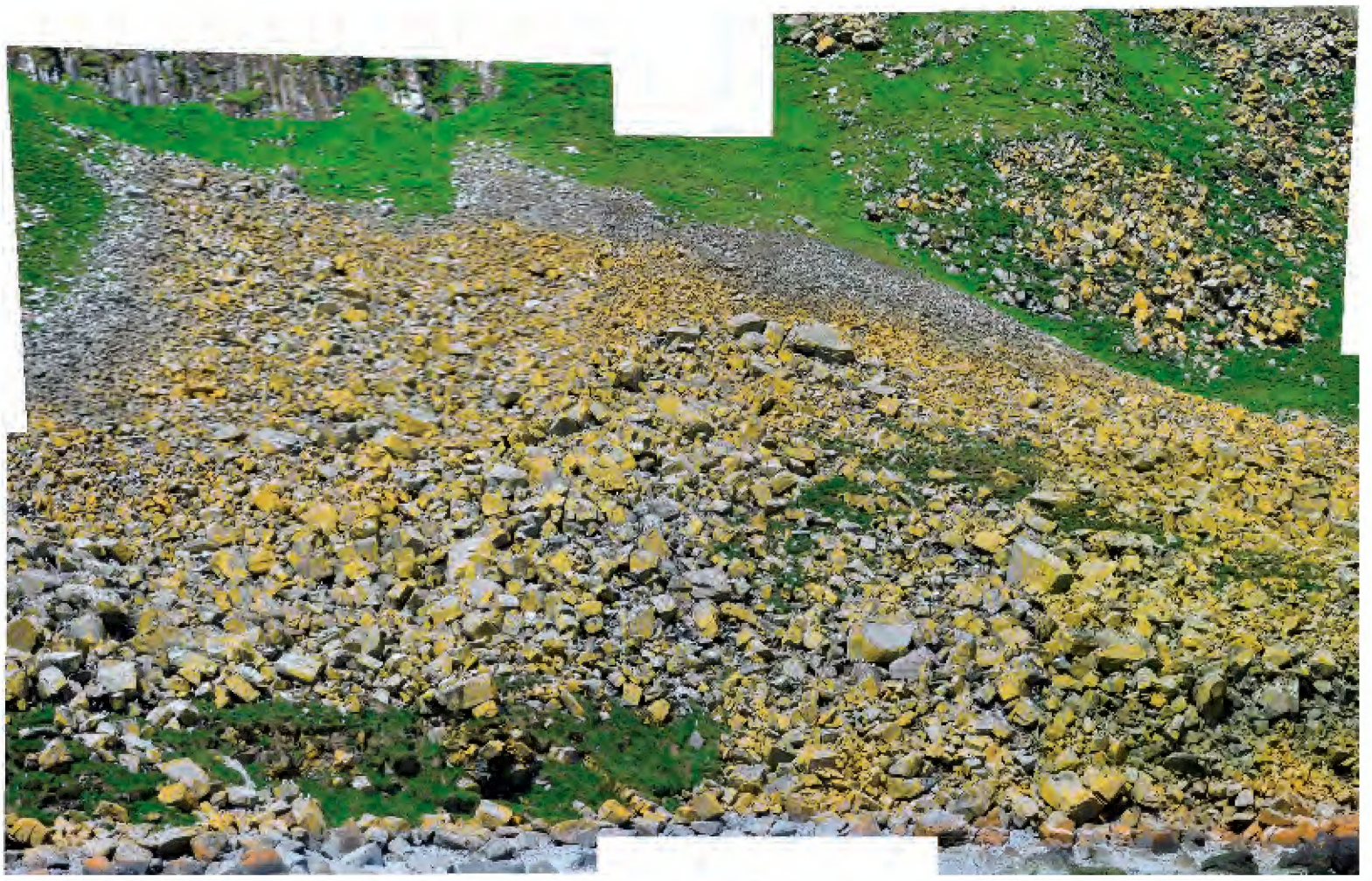

Plate 2. Photomerged Section 6 of Carnach Mor (GE1) showing the complexity of the habitat and the approach used for joining images.

A landing was not possible on Galta Beag (GBG) due to the sea conditions on the day of survey. In order to derive an AOB estimate for GBG, the Puffin colony area was estimated by analysing aerial imagery from 2014 informed by field notes and photographs from boat. We then extrapolated the average AOB density observed on Galta Mor to the colony at Galta Beag to give a total estimated AOB for GBG. This approach (treating GBG as an extension of the colony at GMG) was preferred over method 2 because we felt the result offered a greater degree of confidence. The colonies have very similar characteristics and it was a relatively straightforward exercise to estimate the colony area (with a likely low margin of error).

Counts of attendant individual Razorbills were undertaken within the boulder field colonies at the same time as the Puffin counts (using photography in the larger colonies as described above). It is likely that the complex topography hid many birds, and therefore we expect that this approach delivers a significant underestimate of Razorbill numbers within the boulder field colonies (GE1, GE2, GE5b and ET1). However, since this approach was adopted in previous censuses, our results should allow a broad-scale comparison between years (Brooke 1973, Brooke *et al.* 2002).

Counts of AONs for Shags were performed either by walking along the coastlines of Garbh Eilean and Eilean nan Tighe or by counting from a boat where access by foot was not possible. Breeding Shags were also present throughout the larger boulder fields (GE1 and GE5b). To minimize double counting, parallel transects were walked simultaneously by several surveyors through each colony, the surveyors remaining roughly 10 m apart and searching 5 m either side of their transects. Other cliff-nesting species were counted at the same time as Shags.

Individual Guillemots present within GE1 were counted from two vantage points on the cliffs above the boulder field (grid references NG417984 and NG418980). Double counting was avoided by allocating sections of the colony to each surveyor.

Table 1. Estimated breeding seabird populations of the Shiant Isles, 2015.

	Razorbill (IND)	Guillemot (IND)	Shag (AON)	Kittiwake (AON)	Fulmar (AON)	Puffin (AOB)	Great Skua backed Gull (AOT)	Great Black-backed Gull (AOT)	Lesser Black-Gull (AOT)	Herring Gull (AOT)	Common Gull (AOT)
GMG	130	877	12	40	48	11,015	1	3	0	0	0
GMB	201	434	7	136	97	5,628	0	5	0	0	0
GE1	5,808	560	395	0	0	23,386	0	0	0	0	0
GE2	188	0	6	0	3	1,119	0	0	0	0	0
GE3	37	0	36	0	44	0	0	0	0	0	0
GE4	127	1,105	0	93	150	0	0	0	0	0	0
GE5a	0	0	0	0	145	7,792	0	0	0	0	0
GE5b	242	0	0	0	0	9,463	0	0	0	0	0
GE6	0	0	0	0	54	0	0	0	0	0	0
GE7	0	0	0	0	0	0	30	15		2	25
ET1	748	374	0	36	383	0	0	0	0	0	0
ET2	172	80	3	88	159	0	0	0	0	0	0
ET3	5	0	53	0	10	0	0	0	0	0	0
ET4	0	0	0	0	0	0	5	23	9	2	0
EM1	92	2,917	0	565	45	0	0	0	0	0	0
EM2	100	1,436	0	16	44	0	0	0	0	0	0
EM3	8	189	0	0	28	5,134	0	0	0	0	0
EM4	171	1,082	0	101	296	1,158	0	0	0	0	0
EM5	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	70	0	0	0
Total	8,029	9,054	512	1,075	1,506	64,695	39	116	9	4	25

Table 2. Summary of Puffin census, detailing method and results, Shiant Isles SPA 2015, including subplot Gi, which was used as a reference for GE5b and GE1.

Puffin colony	Count method	Number of quadrats	Density (AOB/m^2)	Area of colony (m^2)	Attendant birds	Attendant/ AOB batio	Reference colony	AOB estimate
GMG	1	18	1.34	8,220	1,206	01:09.1	-	11,015
GBG	1	0[§]	1.34	4,200	715	-	-	5,628
GE1	2	-	-	-	5,495	1:4.26[¥]	GE5a	23,386
GE2	2	-	-	-	200	1:5.6*	GE5a	1,119
GE5a	1	20	0.64	12,098			-	7,792
GE5b	2	-	-	-	1,691	1:5.6*	GE5a	9,463
EM3	1	20	0.83	6,170	2,013	1:2.55	-	5,134
EM4	2	-	-	-	454	-	EM3	1,158
Total								*64,695*
- subplot Gi	*1*			*9631*	*999*/1,313[¥]*	*1:5.6/4.26*		*5,588*

* Based on attendant bird count made at subplot Gi on 17 June 2015. [¥] Based on attendant bird count made at subplot Gi on 21 June 2015. [§] The density of AOBs on Galta Beag was presumed to be the same as that on the Galta Mor (GMG) as a survey was not possible. See Section 2 (Methods) for further information.

Results

Counts of all seabird species from the 2015 census are presented below.

We estimate a Puffin population on the Shiant Isles of 64,695 AOB, making it the most abundant seabird species breeding in the SPA. The majority of the population was concentrated on Garbh Eilean and in particular GE1, where we estimated 23,386 AOB breeding in the boulder field amongst burrows and underneath rocks. Significant numbers of Puffins in grassy slopes were also present on the north slope of Garbh Eilean (GE5a) where we estimated 7,792 AOB, and on the south slopes of Eilean Mhuire (EM3), where we estimated 5,134 AOB. For the first time an accurate estimate of the Puffin population on the Galtachan was achieved. Table 2 shows the method and the basis of the calculation made to estimate the total number of AOBs in each individual Puffin colony within the SPA.

Although our approach to estimating the islands' Puffin population repeats the methods of Brooke (1972) and Brooke *et al.* (2002), we acknowledge that the application of method 2 (stander to AOB ratio) probably involves considerable error, especially if not repeated. We therefore tentatively suggest that the total Puffin population throughout the islands is roughly stable, with little overall change since 2000, 65,200–64,695 AOB. Notwithstanding the likely error, our estimates suggest a 38% decline in the population estimated in the main boulder field colony at GE1, where we estimate 23,386 AOB in 2015, compared with 37,900 AOB in 2000.

This decline has not been reflected in the overall population trend thanks to the estimate for the Galtachan, where we estimate 16,643 AOB in 2015, versus 6,200 in 2000. This apparent increase is likely to be the result of changed survey approaches rather than true growth, but would suggest that the Galtachan account for over a quarter of the total Puffin population within the SPA. Burrow density there was significantly higher than in any of the other colonies surveyed using method 1, possibly because they are the only grassy colonies which are both ungrazed and rat-free (RSPB unpublished data).

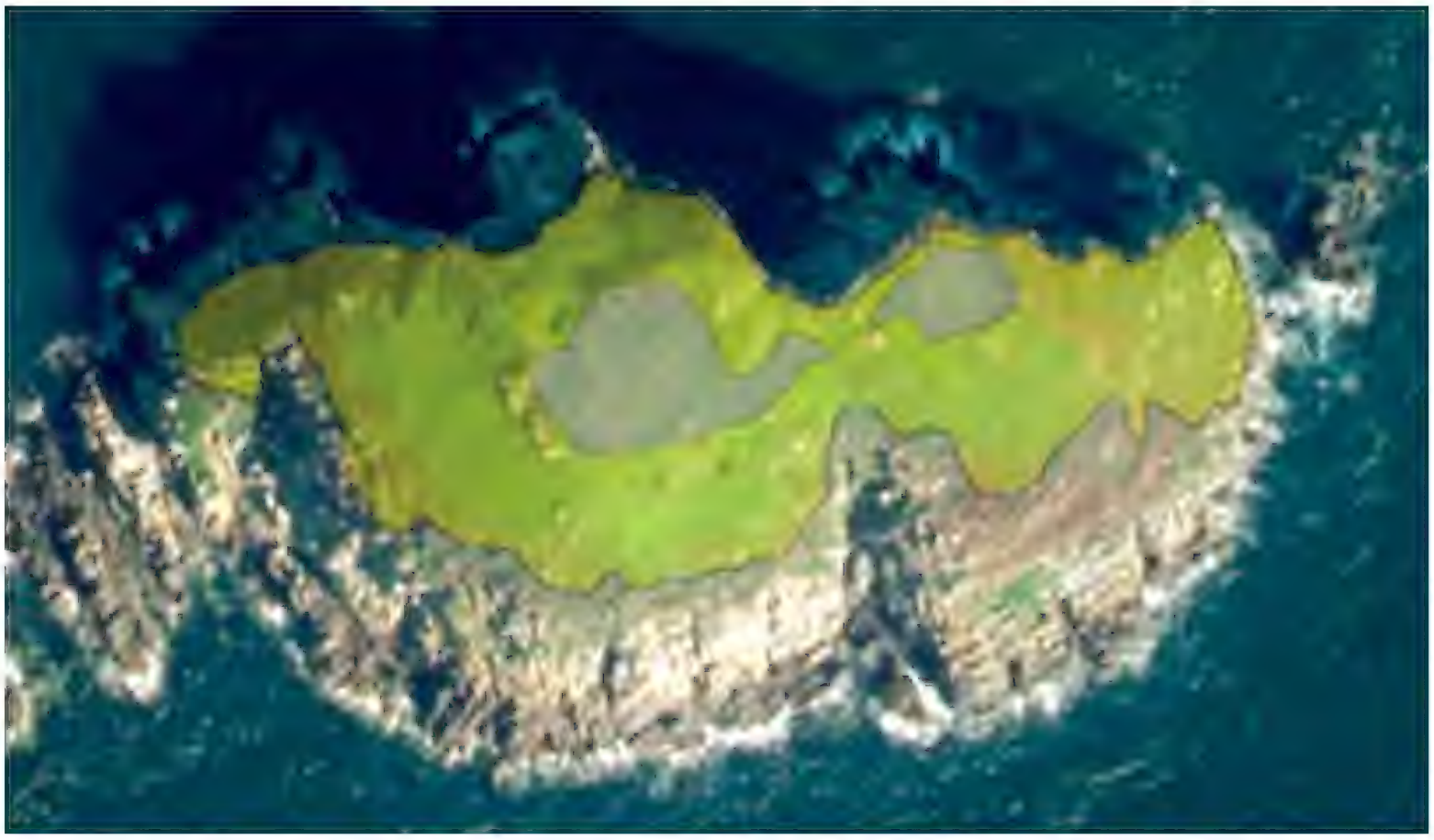

Plate 3. Extent of the Puffin colony on Galta Mor (GMG), Shiant Isles SPA 2015.

Table 3. Previous population estimates of selected species, Shiant Isles SPA.

		Operation Seafarer 1970	Seabird Colony Register 1986	SNH survey 1995	*Seabird 2000* 1999/2000	SNH survey 2008	RSPB & SNH survey 2015
Guillemot	IND	7,970	16,759	12,770	16,456	7,684	9,054
Razorbill	IND	3,535*	10,947	7,715	8,046	6,340	8,029
Fulmar	AON	3,781	6,816	5,246	4,387	n/c	1,506
Kittiwake	AON	1,000	1,807	1,798	2,006	n/c	1,075
Shag	AON	360	1,540	n/c	506	n/c	512
Puffin	AOB	72,890	n/c	n/c	65,170	n/c	64,695
Great Skua	AOT	0**	5	14	26	n/c	38

* Brooke (1973), n/c = not counted, ** not present

Seabird 2000 and our survey of 2015 both noted the absence of Puffin AOBs on the slopes to the north of the current EM4 colony (Brooke *et al.* 2002). Brooke (1972) recorded that two of these colonies (which he named D and E) held 1,170 AOB in 1970 and 760 AOB in 1971. There was no evidence of burrows in these locations (occupied or otherwise) and it therefore appears these smaller colonies have now both been abandoned.

The Guillemot population was estimated at 9,054 individuals. Around half of these (n=4,353) were recorded on the eastern cliffs of Eilean Mhuire (EM1). The number of Guillemots counted in the main boulder field (GE1) was 560 individuals. This is relatively small given the size of available habitat and the number of Puffins and Razorbills breeding in the area.

This abundance represents a 45.5% decline since 1999, when the estimate was 16,456, but a 17% recovery since 2008, when the estimate was 7,684. Our survey suggests this recovery has been experienced primarily in the colonies on the Galtachan (91 individuals in 2008 compared with 1,311 in 2015) and on Garbh Eilean (624 individuals in 2008 compared with 1,665 in 2015), whilst the colonies on Eilean an Tighe and Eilean Mhuire have continued to decline. Both the Galtachan colonies and those on the north-west of Garbh Eilean (GE4) are particularly exposed to storms. This, and the fact that other sub-colonies have not shown the same trends, might suggest that the 2008 estimate was due to poor weather conditions that season, causing birds to abandon those colonies.

We recorded a total number of 8,029 individual Razorbills in the SPA. Razorbills were concentrated in the boulder field colonies, particularly in GE1 (72% of total) where they breed amongst the Puffins. As mentioned above this is likely to be a significant undercount due to the difficulty of making an accurate census in this habitat. Razorbills breed at lower density elsewhere, principally on cliff ledges amongst breeding Guillemots as well as in the smaller boulder fields at ET1 (which has no Puffins), GE5b and GE2.

78% of the Razorbills surveyed in 2015 were recorded in the boulder field colonies of the Shiant Isles SPA with the vast majority of those being located at Carnach Mor (GE1). Our estimate of 8,029 individual Razorbills in 2015 compares to 6,340 in 2008 and 8,046 in 1999. However, there are again considerable differences in trends between colonies, in particular there appears to be a continual decline in numbers breeding on the cliffs of Eilean Mhuire - 2,402 in 1999, 984 in 2008, 371 in 2015 - which may have been offset on Garbh Eilean, where numbers have grown by 2,820 (79%) since 2008 and 1,639 (34%) since 1999. In comparison to Puffins there appears to be no obvious way with which to establish a reference plot and apply method 2, to ensure numbers counted within the boulder field colonies are representative of the total breeding population. By not attempting an alternative, we have allowed our results to be comparable with previous estimates. However, the consequent underestimate remains a significant limitation of this census.

Boat based surveys identified 1,075 Kittiwake AON throughout the islands. These were distributed in similar locations to the Guillemots with the largest counts of 565 AON recorded on the east cliffs of Eilean Mhuire (EM1). A further 176 were counted on the Galtachan.

The population has shown a 46% decline in numbers since 1999 when 2,006 AON were recorded. The major declines happened on Eilean Mhuire, where the population fell from 1,798 in 1999 to 682 in 2015. However, in the smaller sub-populations, small increases in abundance were recorded, 61 to 124 AON on Eilean an Tighe, 15 to 93 on Garbh Eilean and 142 to 176 on the Galtachan. As with the Guillemot, and notwithstanding the fact that the overall population has nearly halved, this localised decline may suggest that the trend is not driven by large changes in prey availability (the main driver of Kittiwake declines elsewhere; Wanless *et al.* 2005). Interestingly, if we look further back, our 2015 estimate is comparable with the 1958 estimate of 1,330 AOS, and the 1970 estimate of 1,000 AOS (Coulson 1963, Brooke 1973).

Fulmars were present on every island. We estimated an overall population of 1,506 Fulmar AON. Highest concentrations were on the east coast of Eilean an Tighe (ET1) and the west coast of Eilean Mhuire (EM4). This species showed the greatest decline. In 2015, we recorded 1,498 AOS, which represents a 66% decline since 1999 and a 78% decline since 1986. Our 2015 estimate is comparable with the numbers recorded by Fisher in the 1950s (see Brooke 1973) and likely reflects changes to fishery discard policy (Hudson & Furness 1988). An additional factor may be an increase in predation by White-tailed Eagles *Haliaeetus albicilla* that are now seen frequently on the islands and are reported to prey substantially on Fulmar (Watson *et al.* 1992, Hipfner *et al.* 2012).

Thirty-eight Great Skua Apparently Occupied Territories (AOT) were recorded on the top of the three main islands. The majority (30 AOT) were recorded in the boggy area on the top of Garbh Eilean, with five on Eilean an Tighe, three on Eilean Mhuire, and none on the Galtachan.

The Great Skua population on the Shiants has shown constant growth since breeding was first recorded in the early 1980s. In 1970, Brooke (1973) recorded a few Great Skua sightings but no record of breeding. In 1986, 5 AOTs were recorded (Murray & Simpson 1987). We now estimate a population of 38 AOT in 2015, an increase of 46% since 1999. This mirrors the situation in many other colonies in the north-west of Scotland, where populations increased in line with high levels of fishery discards in the 1980s and 1990s but have stabilised (relatively) since 2000 (Parsons *et al.* 2006).

We estimate 512 Shag AON, suggesting the population has been roughly stable since 1999 when the estimate was 506 AON. Both are significantly less than the 1986 estimate of 1,540. We recorded a change from 82 AON on the west coast of Eilean an Tighe (ET3) to 56 AON.

One hundred and sixteen Great Black-backed Gull AOT were recorded across the island group, 60% of which were on Eilean Mhuire. There were smaller numbers of other gull AONs; nine Lesser Black-backed, four Herring and 25 Common Gulls, the latter found in a small colony on the west side of Garbh Eilean.

Discussion

This work presents an up-to-date census of the seabird population for one of the most important colonies in Europe, internationally recognised as a Special Protection Area (SPA).

By comparing the 2015 census with previous estimates for Fulmar, Kittiwake, Guillemot, Shag and Great Skua we were able to assess 45 years of population trends, and importantly for SNH Site Condition Monitoring, assess trends since the 1986 baseline, as shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Changes in population baseline for species included within the Shiant Isles SPA designation, Shiant Isle SPA 2015.

	Change from SCR baseline (1986)	Change from *Seabird 2000*
Fulmar (AON)	-78.0%	-65.9%
Guillemot (IND)	-46.4%	-45.5%
Razorbill (IND)	-26.7%	-0.2%
Kittiwake (AON)	-40.5%	-46.4%
Shag (AON)	-66.8%	+1.2%
Great Skua (AOT)	+660%	+46.2%
Puffin (AOB)	-	-3.2%

Since *Seabird 2000,* Fulmar, Guillemot and Kittiwake numbers on the islands have declined substantially. These declines have not been uniform throughout the SPA; in particular, the populations on Eilean Mhuire seem to have suffered the greatest and most consistent declines. There have been some recoveries since 2008, including for Guillemot. Overall, the Puffin population on the Shiants does appear relatively stable, but this may in part be due to better (and larger) estimates from the Galtachan compensating for apparent declines on Garbh Eilean. The core Puffin colony on Garbh Eilean has possibly declined by one-third (from 37,900 to 23,386) since 2000 and the most northerly colonies plotted by Brooke (1972) on Eilean Mhuire are no longer occupied. Overall, Razorbill numbers appear roughly stable despite major declines on Eilean Mhuire (from 2,402 in 1999 to 371 individuals in 2015). The breeding Shag population also appears stable. The number of Great Skua territories continues to increase on the islands.

The data for the cliff and ground nesting species (Guillemot, Fulmar, Kittiwake, Shag and Great Skua) are directly comparable between years as the methodology is straightforward and repeatable with well-established sub-colonies. Whilst we repeated the approaches undertaken by Brooke (1972) and Brooke *et al.* (2002) for the Puffin populations, we are mindful that the limitations of method 2 mean the estimate for the boulder field will have had significant error margins in both surveys, making it difficult to make robust conclusions about trends. To a lesser extent the same may be true of the Razorbill estimate from this same area. That said, we consider the use of photography improves counts of attending birds. Given the nature of the habitat and the very large number of birds, we would suggest that photography be used in the future.

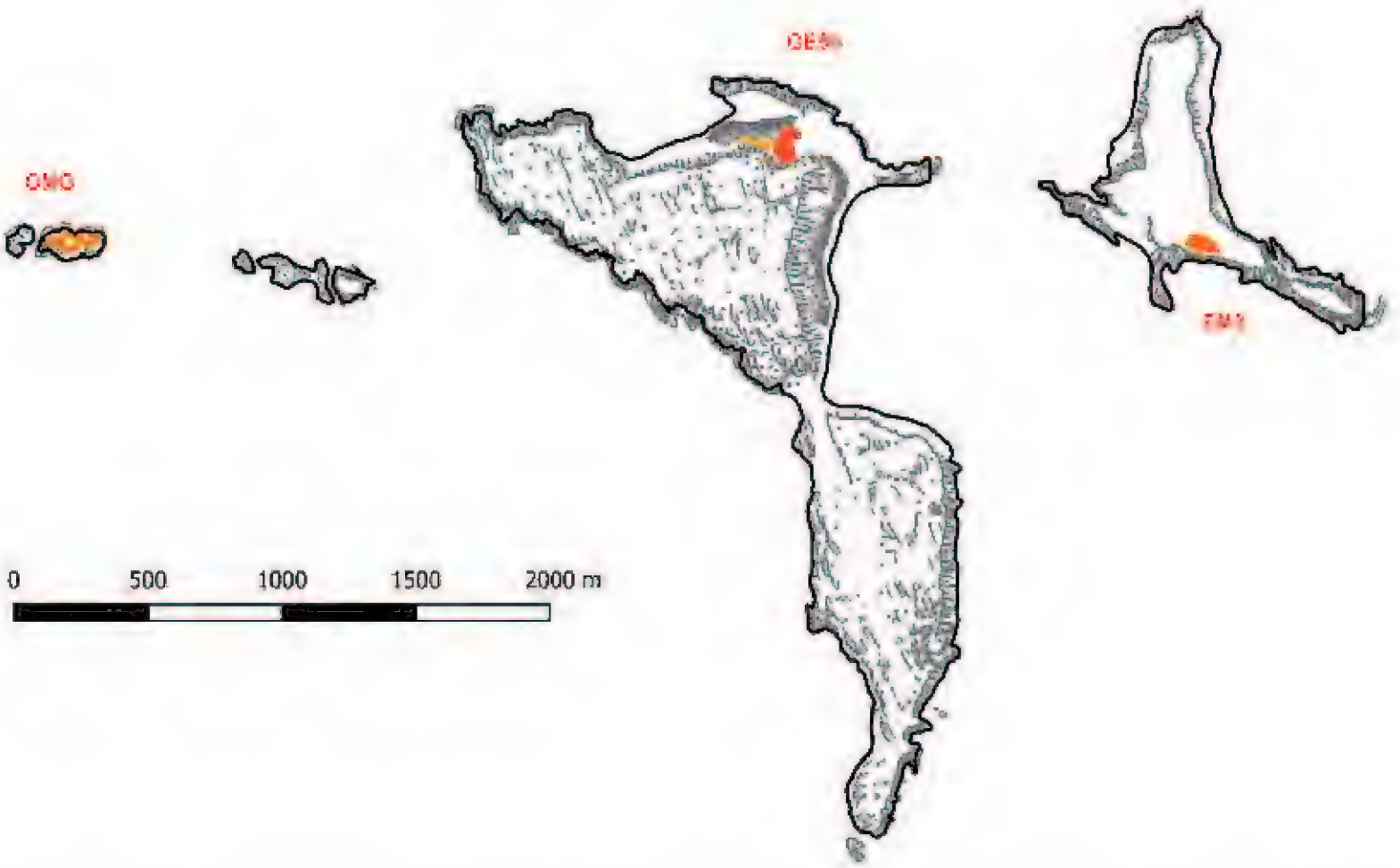

Figure 3. Extent of Puffin colonies mapped with GPS and surveyed using the density approach (method 2) in GE5b (Colony Gi and Gii in Brooke 1972 & Brooke *et al.* 2002), EM3 (Colony A in Brooke 1972 & Brooke *et al.* 2002) and GMG.

This survey did not exhaustively search for Manx Shearwaters or Storm Petrels, which may have been breeding on the islands. However, we note that Storm Petrels lured by playback and caught by the Shiant Auk Ringing Group have not in recent years had brood patches, suggesting the birds found near the islands are not breeding on them (SARG 2013). Following the removal of rats in the winter of 2015/16, it would be sensible for future surveys to also include comprehensive searches for these two species.

We found no conclusive evidence to suggest that the islands' seabird population was decreasing between years due to the presence of rats. However, we did find that Puffin burrow density was considerably higher on the rat-free Galtachan than elsewhere (RSPB, unpublished). We also noted a significant change in the extent of the Puffin colony in EM4. Specifically, two sub-colonies recorded by Brooke (1972) were no longer present in 2000 or 2015.

This study provides a repeatable baseline that will allow the response of the Shiant Isles seabird populations to the removal of rats in winter of 2015/16 to be monitored. Given we have no baseline data from before the arrival of the rats, any future study will allow informed assessment of the impact of rats on the seabird population.

Acknowledgement

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Appendix. A comparison of the labelling of Puffin colonies used by Brooke (1972) and in the present study.

Brooke (1972)	Present study
A	EM3
B	No longer active
C	EM4
D	No longer active
E	No longer active
F	GE1
G	GE5a (> 95% of burrows)
H	GE5b
I	GE5a (< 5% of burrows)
J	GE2
K	GBG
L	GMG

Honey-buzzards in central Scotland: observations and comparisons from two study areas during 2017

C.J. MCINERNY, K.D. SHAW, A. LITTLE, K. LITTLE, K. HOEY, K. GIBB & B. KERR

This paper describes observations of Honey-buzzards during 2017 at two study areas in central Scotland. One of the study areas in east central Scotland, Study Area 1 (SA1), supported an exceptional population of Honey-buzzards in 2016, with up to five territories and 23 birds recorded (Shaw et al. 2017). Continued monitoring of this population during 2017 revealed up to nine territories holding a minimum of 30 birds including up to 18 breeders, at least five non-breeders and 7–8 juveniles. A second study area in west central Scotland, Study Area 2 (SA2), identified a new population of Honey-buzzards during 2017, containing 2–3 territories and up to nine birds, including up to six breeders, two non-breeders and one juvenile. Comparisons between the SA1 and SA2 populations are made, increasing understanding of this rare, secretive and under-recorded breeding species in Scotland.

Honey-buzzards in the Western Palearctic

The Honey-buzzard *Pernis apivorus* is a widespread summer visitor to the Western Palearctic, breeding from Britain and western continental Europe through to western Asia and wintering in sub-Saharan Africa (del Hoyo *et al.* 1994, Ferguson-Lees & Christie 2001). The species mostly inhabits woodlands, nesting in trees, flying to more open habitats to find food items, such as social wasps and bees but also amphibians, reptiles and, more rarely, birds (Appleby 2012, McInerny 2014, Roberts & Law 2014, Harwood & Richman 2016).

Honey-buzzards in Scotland and the UK

Honey-buzzards have been recorded in Scotland since the early 19th Century when the species was considered a very rare and irregular breeder (Forrester *et al.* 2007). This incidence continued until the 1980s when more systematic monitoring revealed that nesting occurred every year in very small numbers with, on just three occasions, small populations forming (Harvey 2005, Shaw *et al.* 2017). This replicated observations elsewhere in the UK as the species was originally thought to be a rare breeder restricted to southern England, but is now recognised as a widespread though localized breeder throughout England and Wales (Brown & Grice 2005, Clements 2005, Roberts & Law 2014). However, the status of Honey-buzzard has been obscured by its secretive nature, especially when breeding, which has resulted in numbers in the UK being underestimated (Holling *et al.* 2016).

Honey-buzzards in central Scotland

In central Scotland, the Honey-buzzard was first recorded in the early 19th Century and only occasionally reported through the first half of the 20th Century, but it was not until the late 1980s and early 1990s that it was recognised that nesting occurred annually, with 1–2 pairs present (Shaw *et al.* 2017). Subsequently, more directed surveying identified one population of up to five territories in east central Scotland with associated non-breeding birds, together constituting up to 16 adults and sub-adults which, in 2016, produced up to seven young (Shaw *et al.* 2017). Surveying elsewhere in central Scotland, to the south and west, revealed the presence of other

Plate 4 (a–f). A dark male Honey-buzzard, named *'Malta'*, seen at the west central Scotland Study Area 2 (SA2). Here he performs the wing-clapping display flight low over Territory A, on 26 August 2017. *'Malta'* performed much wing-clapping from late May through to late August. © *Keith Hoey*

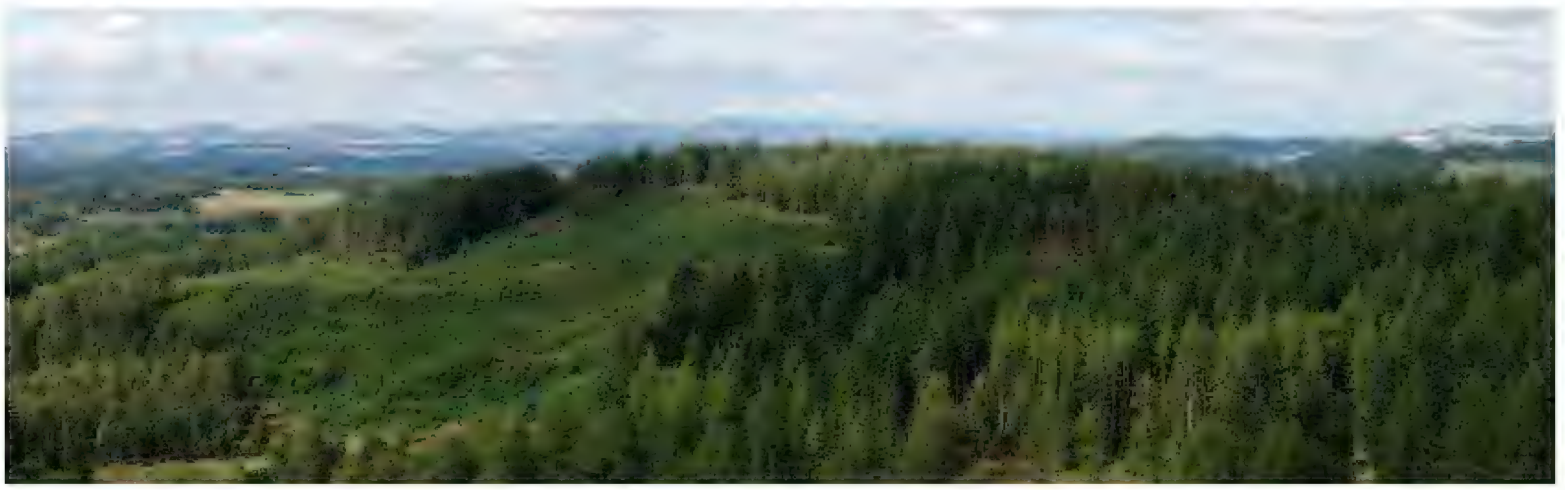


Plate 5. Breeding habitat for Honey-buzzards in the east central Scotland Study Area 1 (SA1), showing views over Territory 8. © *Chris McInerny*

birds in potential breeding habitat. This paper describes the results of the continued study of the east central Scotland population during 2017 and the discovery of another population in west central Scotland during the same year.

Study areas

The locations of the two study areas are kept confidential to protect the breeding birds from human disturbance and persecution. It is important to emphasise that the Honey-buzzard is a Schedule 1 species, meaning that observations should not cause any disturbance and that without an appropriate licence issued by Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH 2016) nests should not be searched for.

Study Area 1 (SA1)

Study Area 1 (SA1), in east central Scotland, is described in detail in Shaw *et al.* (2017). It is approximately 90 km^2 in size, ranging in altitude from 48 m to 516 m, although the study area was enlarged in 2017 to approximately 170 km^2 but with a similar altitude range. In brief, it is a mixture of largely managed wooded and open zones, with stands of coniferous and mature broadleaf trees in an upland setting, along with agricultural and recreational areas (Plates 5–6).

Study Area 2 (SA2)

Study Area 2 (SA2), in west central Scotland, is approximately 80 km^2 in size, ranging in altitude from 30 m to 221 m. Approximately 90% is wooded, with a mixture of commercial conifer stands of Sitka Spruce *Picea sitchensis,* Larch *Larix* spp., Norway Spruce *P. abies* and Scots Pine *Pinus sylvestris*, along with mature broadleaf woods and mixed woodland containing Sessile Oak *Quercus petraea,* Pedunculate Oak *Q. robur*, European Beech *Fagus sylvatica,* European Ash *Fraxinus excelsior*, Rowan *Sorbus aucuparia* and Silver Birch *Betula pendula* (Plates 7–8). The conifer stands are managed resulting in a mosaic of wooded zones and clear fell. A number of lochs and lochans are present with agricultural and recreational land bordering the study area.

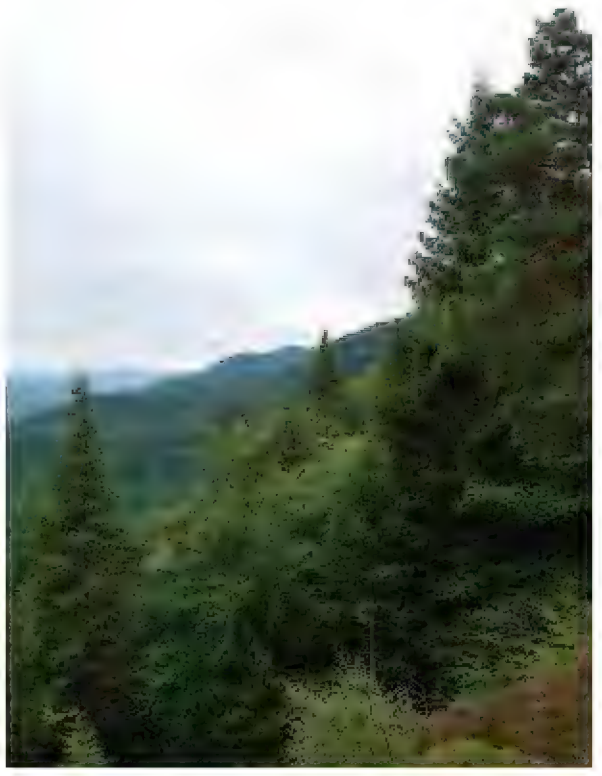


Plate 6. Breeding habitat for Honey-buzzards in the east central Scotland Study Area 1 (SA1), showing views over Territory 3. © *Chris McInerny*

Honey-buzzards have been reported in the region containing SA2 for at least 30 years but, despite surveying by one of the authors since 2008, it was not until 21 May 2013 that a pale grey male was observed (C. McInerny pers. obs.). A juvenile was recorded on 3 September that year suggesting that breeding was occurring nearby. In subsequent years, birds were

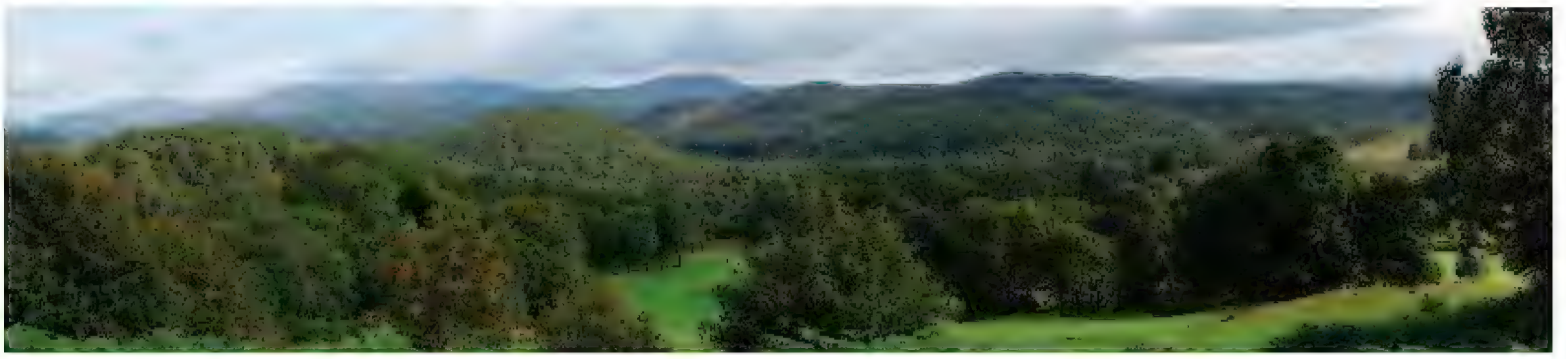


Plate 7. Breeding habitat for Honey-buzzards in the west central Scotland Study Area 2 (SA2), showing views over Territories A, B and C. © *Chris McInerny*

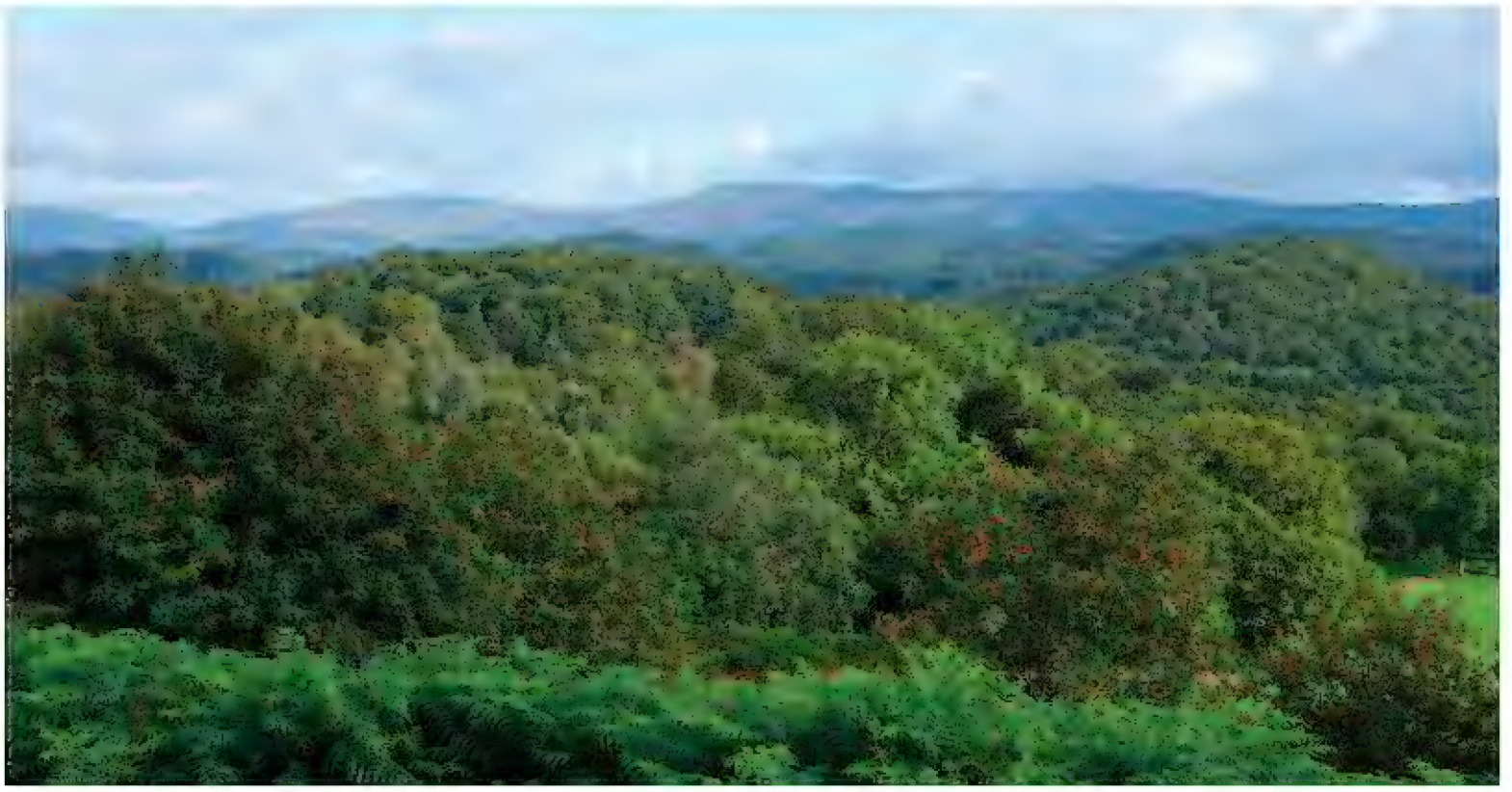


Plate 8. Breeding habitat for Honey-buzzards in the west central Scotland Study Area 2 (SA2), showing views over Territory A. © *Chris McInerny*

occasionally seen in spring and late summer but it was not until May 2017 that up to three together were noted, with prolonged wing-clapping by a male. The results of continued surveying at SA2 during 2017 are described here.

Other raptor species

A number of other raptor species have been recorded in SA1 (Shaw *et al.* 2017); a similar number has been detected in SA2. However, only four species were observed to interact with Honey-buzzards during 2017, in order of approximate number of interactions: Buzzard *Buteo buteo*, Goshawk *Accipiter gentilis*, Hobby *Falco subbuteo* and Osprey *Pandion haliaetus*.

Study methods

The study was based on systematic and coordinated observations during 2017 from late May to mid-September by 21 observers. Sixteen vantage points (VPs) in SA1 were used; seven VPs were used in SA2. Many VP observations lasted 2–6 hours, although some were up to 10 hours. For SA1, in late May and June, VPs were visited on 2–3 days per week, while from July to early September they were visited most days. For SA2, VPs were visited on 2–3 days per week from late May to early September. In total c.712 hours of VP observations were made at SA1 and c.259 hours at SA2 (Table 1). Some searching for nests was completed at both SA1 and SA2 for which a Schedule 1 licence was obtained.

On each visit, the number and age of raptor species were recorded. Location, direction and time of flight, the wing-clapping display flight of Honey-buzzards (including number of wing claps) and other behaviour were also noted. Individual Honey-buzzards were recognised by plumage features, including feather wear and moult patterns (Appleby 2012, Harwood & Richman 2016), both from direct observation and by comparison with field sketches and photographs (Plates 9–21). This allowed the number of birds within the two study areas (adult, gender and juveniles) to be estimated (Shaw *et al.* 2017). Furthermore, the number of territories, pairs and breeding success were estimated by studying three criteria: the pairing of males and females; the identification of non-breeders; and the identification and assignment of juveniles to territories.

The pairing of males and females was initiated from first observations in late May. On arrival, breeding males were identified, catalogued and assigned to a territorial area. This was done by identifying both new individuals and recognising previous year's birds through photography and field sketches (Plates 9–21). At least four individuals at SA1 were recognised as returning from the 2016 season: '*Shorty*', '*Orangetail*', '*Doublenick 1*' and '*Fawnhead*' (Shaw *et al.* 2017). The connection between males and territories was confirmed later in the season by males observed carrying food to nesting woods.

Territorial females were more difficult to identify being generally more secretive and showing less variation in plumage, resulting in some territories being assigned an unidentified female. However, with the identification of non-breeders and observation of territories in early June and from late July to early August it was possible to identify, catalogue and assign most breeding females. For example, during incubation and the early young phase, breeding females could be detected as they repeatedly used the same flight lines at the same time of day to and from nests.

The identification and study of non-breeding Honey-buzzards in breeding populations is well established (Clements 2005, Appleby 2012, Roberts & Law 2014, Harwood & Richman 2016, Shaw *et al.* 2017). Such birds were absent at the beginning of the season but were the most obvious individuals during July and the first half of August. Unlike breeding adults, they can be conspicuous, often flying for long periods and moving between territories.

Juvenile Honey-buzzards were identified by plumage, being pristine and showing no feather moult or wear (Shaw *et al.* 2017). Searches of nesting woods were undertaken and the first juveniles identified at or immediately after the 'branching stage' when they perch on branches close to the nest or have just started short flights (Roberts & Law 2014, Harwood & Richman 2016). Thereafter, other territories which still had active nests, determined by adult behaviour such as food being brought to nests, were studied to the beginning of September until juveniles were seen. If no juveniles were seen a negative result 'breeding outcome unknown' was recorded for the territory. This likely resulted in an underestimation of breeding numbers. The authors of this paper intend, in the future, to test this largely observational methodology against other more traditional methods.

Results

Honey-buzzards were noted at SA1 and SA2 from late May to early September. Graphical summaries of day counts (the number of individuals seen on each day) for 10-day periods from May to September for males, females, gender undetermined and the wing-clapping displays of both males and females are shown in Figures 4–5. The number of observer hours for each 10-day period for SA1 and SA2 are listed in Table 1.

May and June - arrival dates

SA1: The first observed birds were two males, one '*Shorty*' (Plate 9) and the other unidentified, both displaying in low cloud and rain on 21 May. '*Shorty*' returned to the same Territory 5 that he used in 2016 (Shaw *et al.* 2017), but at least four days earlier than the previous year. On 21

May, at 11:25 hrs, '*Shorty*' flew for 10 minutes from Territory 5 to Territory 2 where, at 12:40–12:55 hrs, an unidentified male wing-clapped 20 times in two bursts of 10, with '*Shorty*' wing-clapping four times from 13.00–13.15, apparently in response. Although monitoring had not been completed before this date, from their behaviour (and the weather conditions), it appeared unlikely that 21 May was the arrival day at SA1 for either bird with instead both probably already present 2–3 days. Another two unidentified Honey-buzzards were observed elsewhere on 21 May at 15:00 hrs over Territory 8. The first confirmed female was not recorded until 1 June, when one flew over Territory 3 and Territory 4 at 10:39 hrs.

Table 1. Number of observer hours for 10-day periods from May to September 2017 for SA1 and SA2.

	10-day period	SA1 (hours)	SA2 (hours)
May	1–10	-	-
	11–20	-	-
	21–31	49	22
June	1–10	23	23
	11–20	34	17
	21–30	52	-
July	1–10	82	26
	11–20	102	30
	21–31	86	29
August	1–10	87	33
	11–20	89	31
	21–31	97	34
September	1–10	12	10
	11–20	-	4
	21–30	-	-
Total		712	259

SA2: The first birds were three seen on 23 May, which flew for up 50 minutes from 12:10 hrs, at times high in the sky, with one male displaying for extended periods over Territory A. For 30 minutes of this time two, likely a pair, flew together showing much interaction: parallel flying, 'follow-my-leader', talon-grappling and over 100 wing claps by a dark-plumaged male. At one stage, these were joined by a third, unidentified bird. The dark male was seen subsequently throughout the season and named '*Malta*' (Plates 4, 17–20). '*Malta*' and a second bird, possibly a female, finally dropped into a wood at Territory A, which '*Malta*' associated with for the remainder of the season. As at SA1, based on the birds' behaviour, it appeared unlikely that 23 May was their arrival day but instead that they had been present for 2–3 days, although monitoring had not been completed before this date. Subsequently, the first confirmed female was seen on 28 May at 11:45 hrs over Territory A and Territory B, which flew for 40 minutes without wing-clapping. In 2016, Honey-buzzards were seen at SA2 on the earlier dates of 11 and 14 May, both over Territory A (C. McInerny, R. Miller pers. obs.).

Plate 9. The male '*Shorty*', 24 May 2017, Territory 5, SA1. © *Kris Gibb*

These arrival dates are similar to previous observations: most Honey-buzzards appear in Scotland during the second half of May, although earlier arrivals have been recorded; elsewhere in the UK they reach breeding grounds from mid-May (Roberts & Law 2014, Harwood & Richman 2016).

The subsequent behaviour of Honey-buzzards during late May differed at the two study areas. At SA1 on 22 May '*Shorty*' and the unidentified male wing-clapped again over Territories 2, 3 and 5, but by 24 May only '*Shorty*' flew over Territory 2 and Territory 5 with no wing-clapping. The unidentified male was not knowingly seen again, with '*Shorty*' next observed on 17 August. In contrast, at SA2, '*Malta*' wing-clapped

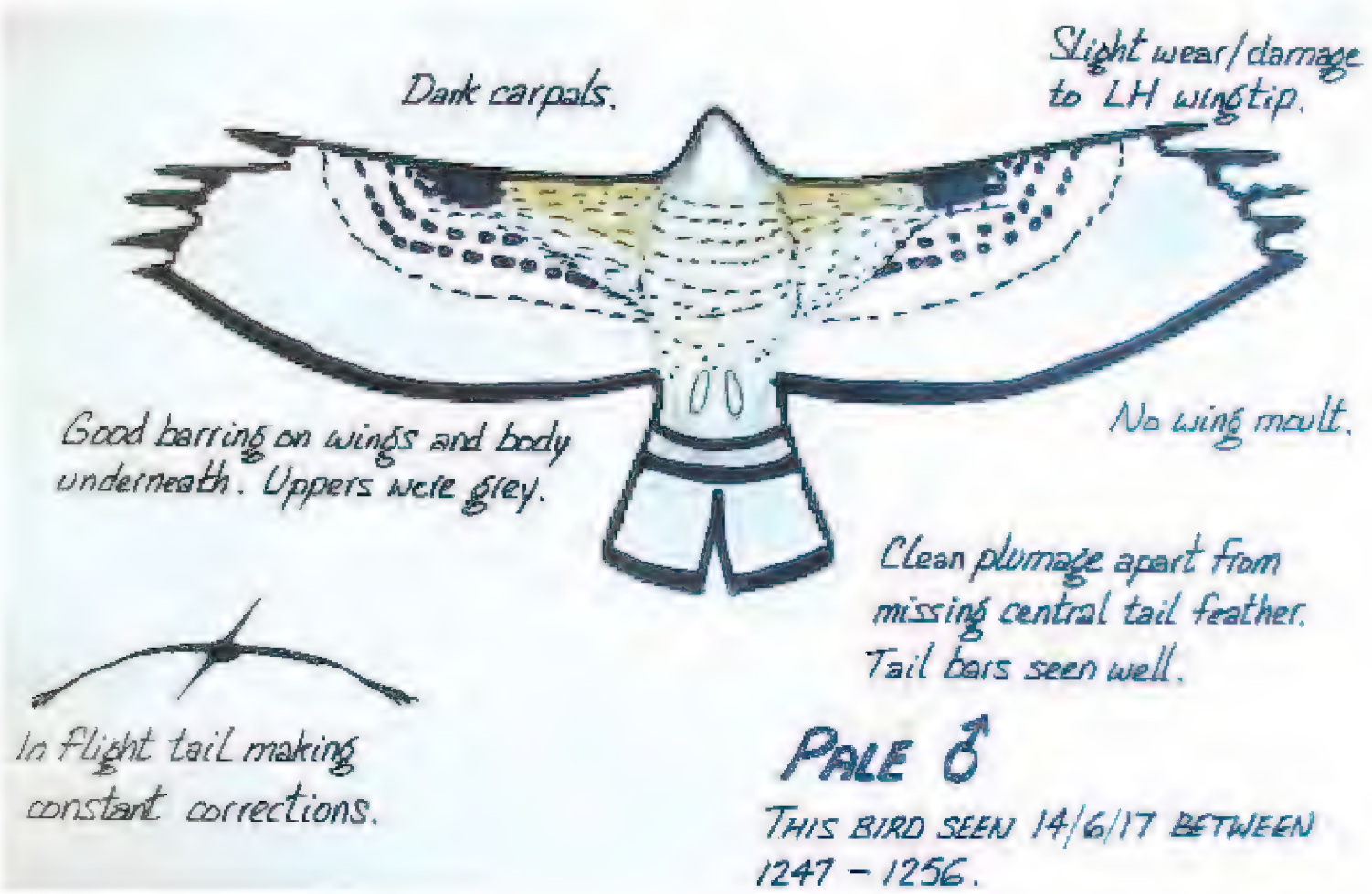

Dark carpals.
Slight wear/damage to LH wingtip.
Good barring on wings and body underneath. Uppers were grey.
No wing moult.
Clean plumage apart from missing central tail feather. Tail bars seen well.
In flight tail making constant corrections.
PALE ♂
THIS BIRD SEEN 14/6/17 BETWEEN 1247 – 1256.

Figure 1. Field sketch of the male '*Shakespeare*', which was circulated amongst the authors, 14 June 2017, Territory 8, SA1. © *Ali & Kenny Little*

regularly to the end of the month, sometimes with two other unidentified individuals that also wing-clapped occasionally. These birds would often fly extremely high over Territories A, B and C during display flights, to the extent that occasionally they would be lost in low clouds.

June - incubation period

Honey-buzzards were seen during June at SA1 and SA2, with birds conspicuous at SA2 (Figures 4–5). This differed from observations during 2016 at SA1 when they were largely unobtrusive.

SA1: Less activity was seen from the beginning to the middle of the month, although new birds were identified and named including two males: '*Shakespeare*' on 14 June over Territory 8 at 12:47–12:56 hrs (Figure 1); and '*Whitespot*' wing-clapping on 23 June over Territory 3 at 14:45 hrs (Plates 10–11). By the end of the month more activity was noted. On 28 June, another new male '*Plain John*' flew for 45 minutes from 14:43 hrs over Territory 2, wing-clapping 36 times. He then flew into neighbouring Territory 3 and Territory 4 eliciting the male '*Orangetail*', a returning bird from 2016 (Shaw *et al.* 2017), with the two flying for a further 35 minutes, together wing-clapping 90 times.

SA2: Birds were very active. For example '*Malta*' wing-clapped on 3, 4 (at least 92 wing claps) and 11 (23 wing claps) June, while completing territorial flights of up 40 minutes high in the sky around the entire SA2 study area, covering Territories A, B and C. On 11 June from 10:10–10:20 hrs this wing-clapping elicited response from another four birds to the west: a pale male with a dark head named '*Fishy*' due to his resemblance to an Osprey and an unidentified female over Territory B, with '*Fishy*' wing-clapping 23 times; and another unidentified two birds (likely a pair) further west over Territory C. Later, at 10:35 hrs, two males, possibly '*Fishy*' and another unidentified male, wing-clapped over 10 times each low over woods, but about 2–3 km apart above Territory B and Territory C, apparently in response to each other. By 17 June '*Malta*' had ceased wing-clapping but continued his long, high territorial flights around SA2; he resumed wing-clapping later in the season in late July.

Plates 10–11. The male '*Whitespot*', 23 June 2017, Territory 3, SA1. © *Bruce Kerr*

Honey-buzzards typically become inconspicuous during incubation (Roberts & Law 2014). Birds were unobtrusive earlier during June at SA1 than SA2 suggesting that pairs were incubating at the former study area first. This accords with the average first egg-laying date for Honey-buzzards in the UK being early June, although it can be later in the month and even early July (Forrester *et al.* 2007). Eggs are incubated for around 32 days, usually hatching from late June and early July.

July and August - feeding young, new arrivals and display

Honey-buzzards were seen many times during July and August, the peak period of observation at both study areas, when much activity, interaction and display occurred (Figures 4–5).

Territories and behaviour

The number of territories and breeding pairs was estimated and mapped, with birds recognised by plumage, feather wear and moult patterns; and interactions within pairs and between mated birds and non-breeders observed. Up to nine territorial pairs were counted in SA1 with at least five non-breeders; and up to three territorial pairs in SA2, with another two potential non-breeders.

SA1: The Territory number designations, 1–5, follow those in Shaw *et al.* (2017), with new territories identified in 2017 numbered 6–10.

Territory 1. This pair was not seen during 2017 and was thought to have moved out of the study area, although some display by unidentified birds was observed over the territory late in the season.

Territory 2. Approximately 3.5 km north-west of Territory 1 the male '*Orangetail*' and the female '*Doublenick 1*'. This pair used the same territory in 2016 (Shaw *et al.* 2017); in 2016 she was named '*Doublenick*' but here '*Doublenick 1*' to distinguish her from '*Doublenick 2*'. The pair produced two young: two brown juveniles were seen soaring together high over the territory on 30 August at 12:38 hrs.

Territory 3. About 3 km west of Territory 2 a pair with a pale grey male with white marks on his upper-parts named '*Whitespot*' (Plates 10–11, Figure 2), and a brown female showing an obvious gap on the inner primary feathers of her left wing named '*Whiteshaft*' (Figure 2). This pair produced 1–2 young.

Territory 4. About 3 km south of Territory 3 a pair with a pale male with missing tail feathers named '*Ragtail*' (Plates 12–14), and a female with missing wing feathers named '*Doublenick 2*'. The breeding outcome was unknown.

Territory 5. A pair approximately 3 km south-east of Territory 4, the male '*Shorty*' and an unknown female that remained unseen despite many hours of observations and searches of the nest wood. '*Shorty*' used the same territory in 2016 (Shaw *et al.* 2017). '*Shorty*' was observed carrying food on 9 August and 17 August. This pair produced one young seen on 20 August: a pale juvenile, it appeared low over trees at 16:45 hrs on the same day that '*Shorty*' was seen wing-clapping low over the same trees at 10:10 hrs.

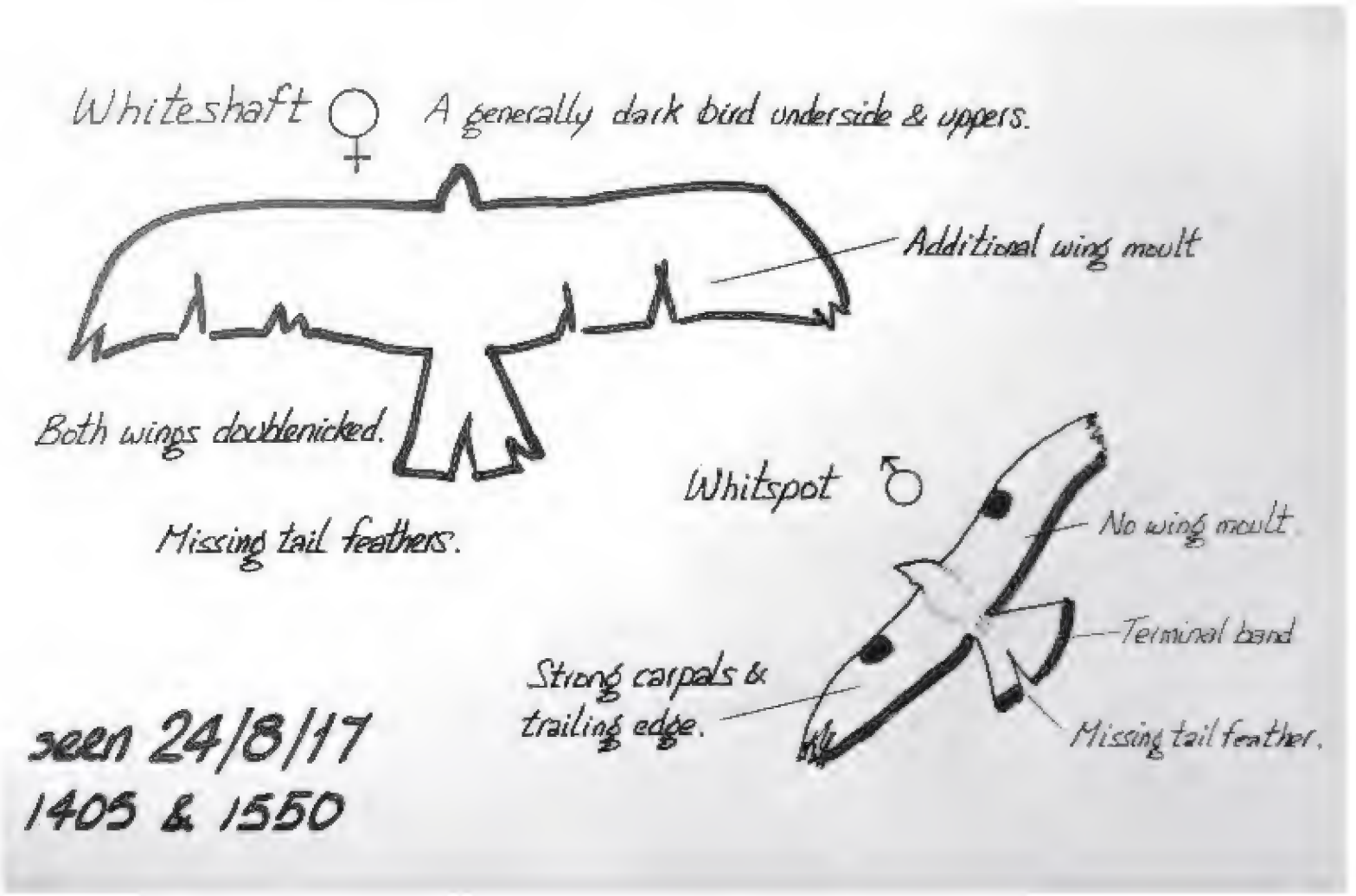


Figure 2. Field sketch of the female '*Whiteshaft*' and the male '*Whitespot*', which was circulated amongst the authors, 24 August 2017, Territory 2 and Territory 3, SA1. © *Ali & Kenny Little*

Plates 12–14. The male '*Ragtail*', 31 July 2017, Territory 4, SA1. © *Kris Gibb*

Plate 15. The male *'Shakespeare'*, 1 August 2017, Territory 8, SA1. © *Bruce Kerr*

Territory 6. About 3.5 km north of Territory 3 this pair consisted of a male named '*Fawnhead*' returning from 2016, when he was thought to be a non-breeder (Shaw *et al.* 2017), and an unidentified female. The pair produced one young, with a juvenile seen over the territory on 29 August at 11:20 hrs flying with a Buzzard.

Territory 7. A potential pair approximately 3 km west of Territory 5. The male was pale brown and the female dark. The territory was not confirmed and the breeding outcome unknown.

Territory 8. A pair approximately 3 km south of Territory 1. The male was named '*Shakespeare*' (Figure 1 and Plate 15) and the female '*Anne*' (Figure 3). '*Shakespeare*' was observed carrying food items on a number of days through July and August, including Common Frog *Rana temporaria* (Plate 16) and, on two occasions, wasp or bee (Hymenoptera) comb. This pair produced one young with a dark juvenile seen on 24 August at 11.00–11.35 soaring over the territory and landing clumsily on a tree top, perched with wings outstretched.

Territory 9. A pair approximately 3.5 km north-east of Territory 8. The male was extremely pale and the dark female had missing feathers in the left wing. One young was produced with a light brown juvenile seen over the territory on 6 September at 14:15 hrs.

Territory 10. A pair 2–3 km south of Territory 9. The male '*Andrew*' was photographed, but the female unknown. The breeding outcome was unknown.

SA2:

Territory A. The dark male named '*Malta*' (Plates 4, 17–20) was especially active flying high around this territory throughout the season, but also over Territory B and Territory C, and persistently wing-clapping from late May to mid-June and from late July to late August. In contrast, the female, named '*Sicily*', having missing tail and primary feathers, was seen only early in the season. This pair produced one young, which flew low over the territorial wood on 1 September twice at 12:45 and 13:10 hrs.

Territory B. A pair 2–3 km west of Territory A. The male was named '*Fishy*' having very pale underparts with a dark head and so superficially resembling an Osprey, and an unidentified female. The breeding outcome was unknown.

Territory C. A bird was seen wing-clapping approximately 3 km west of Territory B in response to '*Fishy*' wing-clapping; on a few occasions, a second unidentified bird, likely a female, was observed. The breeding outcome was unknown.

Non-breeders

Honey-buzzards do not breed until 2–3 years of age although such immature birds can migrate to the summer breeding grounds (Roberts & Law 2014). Hence, in some breeding populations up to 50% of birds are non-breeders (Clements 2005). A number of presumed non-breeders were recorded at each study area: at least five at SA1 and up to two at SA2. These were seen through July and the first half of August, sometimes displaying, and were not noted to associate with a particular territory. For example, at SA1 on 18 July an unidentified bird flew through Territory 3 with three wing claps then north into Territory 6 with 12 wing claps at high altitude before returning along the same flight line. Another individual at SA1, '*Plain John*' (Plate 21), was seen to fly and display over Territories 2, 3 and 4 throughout July and early August.

Plates 16. The male '*Shakespeare*', 1 August 2017, Territory 8, SA1, carrying a Common Frog. © *Bruce Kerr*

Breeding success

Juvenile Honey-buzzards were observed from 20 August to 6 September, which is consistent with dates in England where a range of 31 July to 7 September has been reported (Roberts & Law 2014), and from early August in Scottish studies (Forrester *et al.* 2007, Shaw *et al.* 2017). A minimum of seven juveniles were seen at SA1 and one juvenile at SA2, from six pairs and one pair respectively, where the outcome was known, suggesting breeding successes of 1.2 chicks and 1.0 chicks/successful pair. This is slightly lower than the 1.4 chicks/successful pair reported for SA1 in 2016 (Shaw *et al.* 2017) and the 1.9 chicks/successful pair from elsewhere in Scotland (Forrester *et al.* 2007).

Plate 17. The male '*Malta*', 16 July 2017, Territory A, SA2. © *Keith Hoey*

Interactions with other raptor species

Honey-buzzards were seen to interact with other raptor species. The most frequent behaviour was interactions with Buzzards,

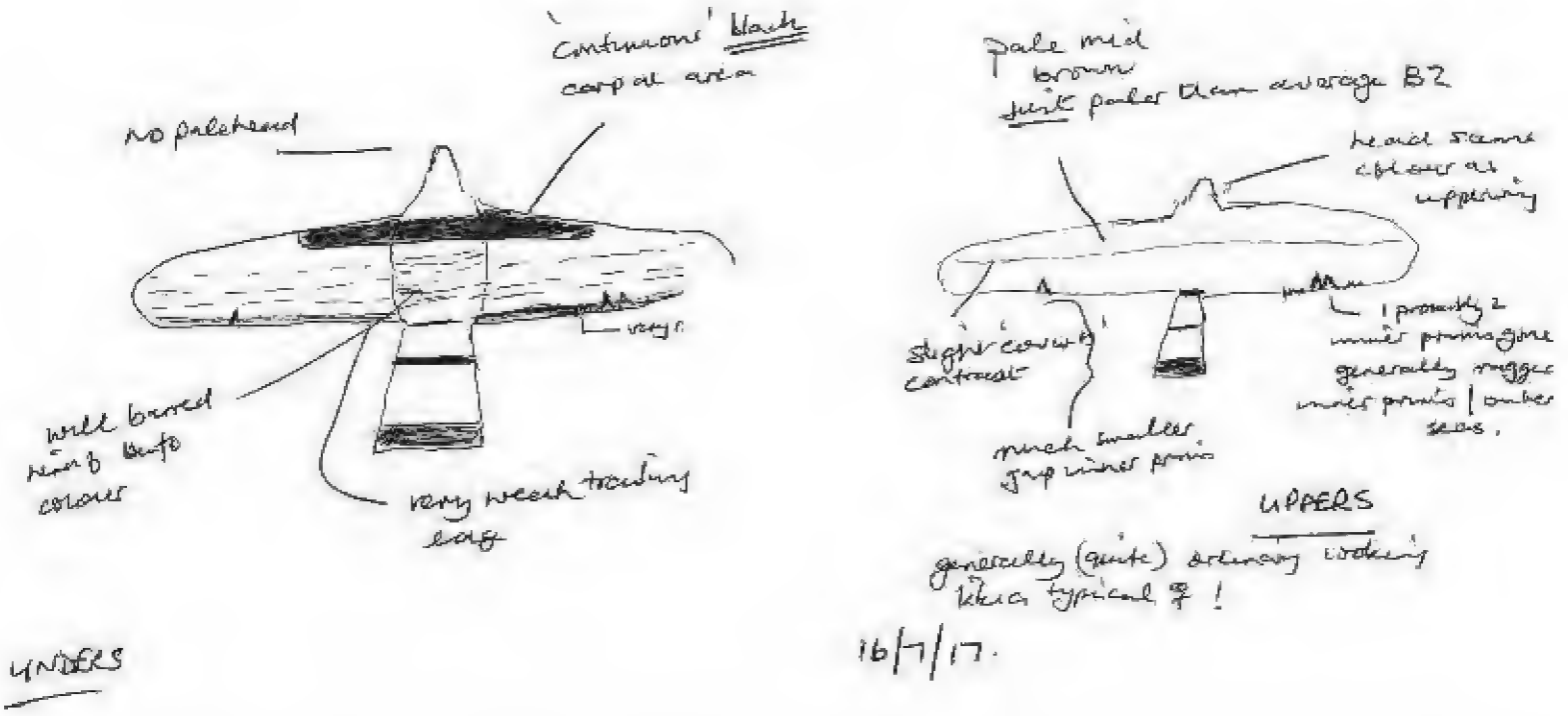
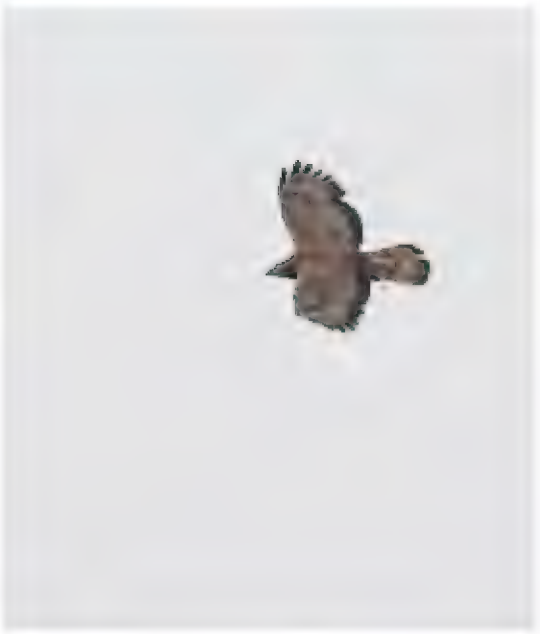


Figure 3. Field sketch of the female '*Anne*', which was circulated amongst the authors, 16 July 2017, Territory 8, SA1. © *Ken Shaw*



Plates 18–19. The male *'Malta'*, 30 July 2017, Territory A, SA2. © *Keith Hoey*

Plate 20. The male *'Malta'*, 10 August 2017, Territory A, SA2. © *Keith Hoey*

sometimes flying together but also with Buzzards aggressively chasing Honey-buzzards. Goshawks, both juvenile males and juvenile females, were seen to interact and mob Honey-buzzards on a number of occasions. More rarely Hobby was seen to fly with Honey-buzzard. For example, over Territory 2, one aggressively mobbed and pursued '*Plain John*' on 25 July at 14:45 hrs and another flew with three Honey-buzzards (two males and a female) on 31 July at 12:45–12:48 hrs. On two occasions interactions with Osprey were seen: on 4 August at 09:40 hrs '*Shakespeare*' 'pushed' three Ospreys through Territory 8; and on the 13 August at 13:30 hrs an Osprey harried '*Fawnhead*' five times over Territory 2, to which he wing-clapped 10 times over 12.5 minutes.

August and September - last dates for adults and juveniles

SA1: The dates of last adults were on 24 August when the female '*Whiteshaft*' flew over Territory 2 at 14.05 with two wing-clapping displays and the male '*Whitespot*' over Territory 3 at 15:50 hrs (Figure 2). The last juveniles were two on 6 September when one flew over Territory 2 at 12:11 hrs and the other over Territory 9 at 14:15 hrs. These are 12 and five days earlier than 2016 when the last adults and juveniles were on 6 and 11 September, respectively (Shaw *et al.* 2017).

SA2: The last adult observed was '*Malta*', who wing-clapped three times low over trees, at 11:01 hrs on 26 August over Territory A (Plate 4). Such behaviour late in the summer suggests that he was still associated with an active nest containing young. Subsequently, one pale brown juvenile was seen twice on 1 September flying low over Territory A at 12:45 and 13:10 hrs. No more birds were seen during a further 14 hours of observations.

Discussion

Wing-clapping display flights

Much wing-clapping by males and females was observed at both study areas throughout the breeding season (Plate 4, Figures 4–5). On first arrival, males displayed to each other, even in low cloud and heavy rain, presumably to establish territories before the appearance of females (Appleby 2012, Harwood & Richman 2016). Males next wing-clapped with females in attendance, establishing pair bonding, with females sometimes wing-clapping in response. This could be either very high in the sky, even at cloud bases, or low over trees. Later in the summer, much display by breeding and non-breeding males and females occurred. In the case of non-breeders, such display is thought to reflect immature birds attempting to establish territories and pairs. However, breeding birds also displayed later in the season at both study areas. In some cases, this was in response to other displaying non-breeders or breeders; on other occasions, birds wing-clapped low over nests with developing chicks. Males, breeders and non-breeders are also

Plate 21. The male presumed non-breeder *'Plain John'*, 31 July 2017, Territory 3, SA1. © *Kris Gibb*

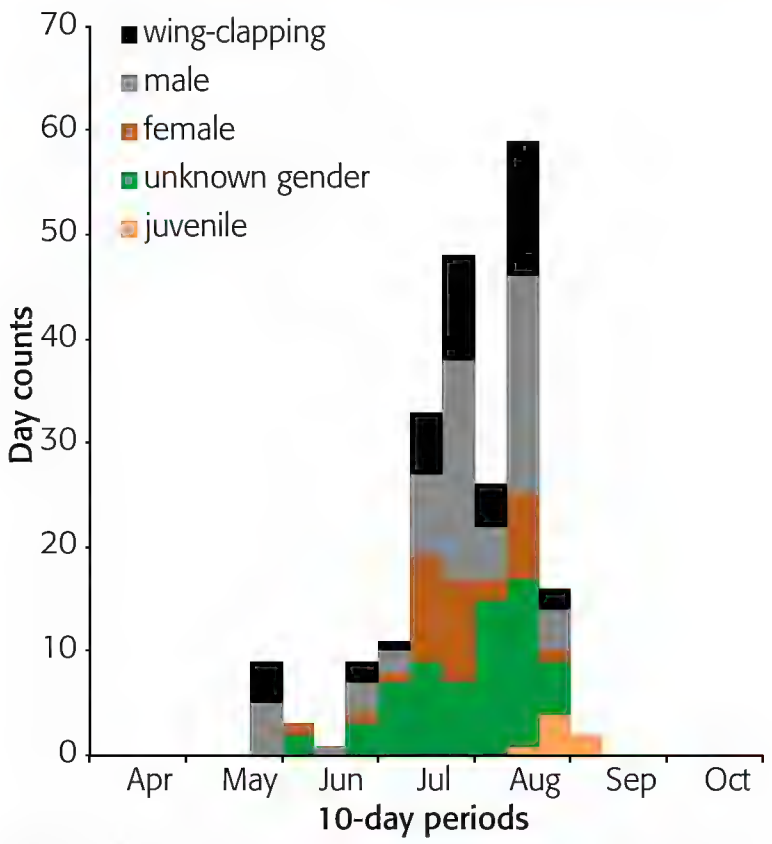


Figure 4. Numbers of Honey-buzzards at the east central Scotland Study Area 1 (SA1), 2017. Day counts (the number of individuals seen on each day) for 10-day periods from May to September of males, females, gender undetermined, juveniles and the wing-clapping displays of both males and females are plotted. The observer hours that generated these data are shown in Table 1.

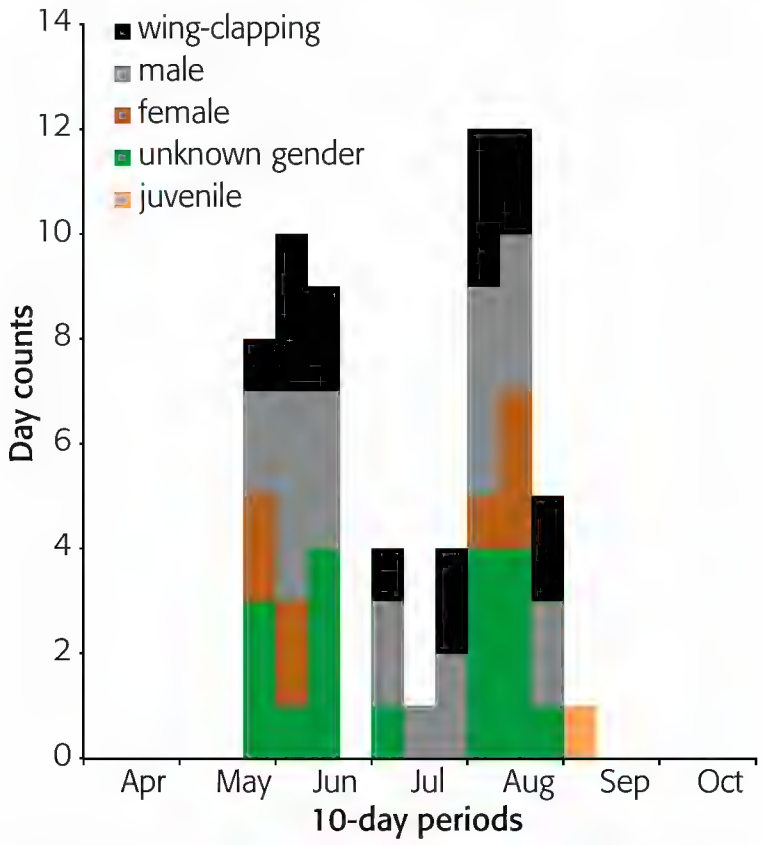


Figure 5. Numbers of Honey-buzzards at the west central Scotland Study Area 2 (SA2), 2017. Day counts (the number of individuals seen on each day) for 10-day periods from May to September of males of males, females, gender undetermined, juveniles and the wing-clapping displays of both males and females are plotted. The observer hours that generated these data are shown in Table 1.

thought to display late in the season over territories in which they intend to nest the following year (McInerny 2014). In conclusion, when Honey-buzzards form populations of a number of pairs in close proximity as described here, much wing-clapping can occur from late May to late August. This is important when surveying the species as birds will often wing-clap high in the sky and so be conspicuous from long distances allowing their detection.

Breeding densities

The breeding densities at the two study areas, with nests approximately 2–4 km apart, are similar to those observed elsewhere in the UK and on the continent (Voskamp 2000, Roberts & Lewis 2003, Hardey *et al.* 2013, Harwood & Richman 2016). Indeed, on the continent, where high concentrations of breeding raptors have been observed, Honey-buzzards can be found at a density of 26 pairs per 100 km^2 with a nearest-neighbour distance of 1,758 ± 453 m (Gamauf *et al.* 2013). This suggests that birds can nest as close as 1.3 km apart in optimum habitat.

It has been reported that habitat is not a strong determinant of nest-site selection for Honey-buzzards but instead is largely dictated by the distribution of predators, particularly Goshawk (Gamauf *et al.* 2013). Thus, it is striking that Goshawks are present at SA1 and SA2 where it appears that Honey-buzzard numbers are increasing at both study areas. Future surveying will reveal if these trends continue.

Comparison of SA1 and SA2 habitat

The geography and habitat composition at SA1 and SA2 are strikingly similar: managed woodland in an upland situation with south facing slopes. This is not an uncommon habitat in central Scotland or in the country as a whole. In fact, a few isolated territories were detected elsewhere in central Scotland during 2017 in comparable habitat, as well as 2–3 territories in lower, mixed, agricultural areas.

Honey-buzzards observed in central Scotland outside the study areas

Limited survey work was completed during 2017 in central Scotland outside the two study areas. This identified other Honey-buzzards through the summer period in potential breeding habitat in at least six other locations. These were found to the north and south of SA1, and at three locations between SA1 and SA2 in 'central' central Scotland. Indeed, as mentioned, many parts of central Scotland contain habitat very reminiscent of that found at SA1 and SA2 and so apparently suitable for nesting. Future work by our group will attempt to determine how widespread breeding Honey-buzzards are in central and southern Scotland.

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Fourteen co-observers have been involved in this study and we thank them for their contributions: Davie Abraham, John Anderson, Andy Carroll, Andy Clements, Rick Goater, Pete Gordon, Angus Hogg, Rod Miller, Brian Minshull, John Nadin, Peter Richman, Graham Sparshott, Andrew Whewell and Mark Wilkinson. Particular thanks to Andrew Whewell who again made an outstanding contribution to the fieldwork. Rob Clements, Roy Dennis, Roy Frost, the late Ray Hawley, Robin Khan and Steve Roberts have been inspirational figures. David Douglas advised us on future methodologies. Thanks to Rob Clements and Rod Miller for comments on the text. Jim Steele and Dave Wood have assisted over decades. We liaised with Mark Holling (Rare Bird Breeding Panel), Clive McKay, Claire Smith and the Tayside Raptor Group. All relevant Scottish Ornithologists' Club (SOC) Local Recorders were kept informed. We are grateful to Forestry Commission Scotland and other forest managers for sympathetic management and access. We thank Scottish Natural Heritage for issuing the Schedule 1 licence to allow some of the survey work. We thank a reviewer for very helpful suggestions to improve the text. To support the study CJMcI received a travel grant from the Glasgow Natural History Society, Professor Blodwen Lloyd Binns Bequest; and KDS received a travel grant from the SOC.

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Plate 22. Pair of Whooper Swans on breeding loch after a breeding failure when the nest was flooded, south Ayrshire, May 1993. © *Geoff Shaw*

Regular breeding by a pair of Whooper Swans in Ayrshire, 1991–2017

G. SHAW

Introduction

In winter, Scotland supports an internationally important number of Whooper Swans *Cygnus cygnus*, accounting for 11% of the Icelandic breeding population (Hall *et al.* 2016). By contrast, breeding attempts in Scotland were initially scarce and sporadic, and often attributed either to injured birds, incapable of making the return journey to Iceland, or to feral pairs, of recent captive origin. Notwithstanding that some of these pairings may have involved 'wild' partners, nesting by seemingly fit pairs of wild Whooper Swans has been reported only occasionally in historic times; most recently a 31-year gap separated successful breeding on Benbecula (Outer Hebrides) in 1947 and Tiree (Inner Hebrides) in 1978–79 (Thom 1986, Holloway 1996, Forrester *et al.* 2007).

Since 1978, potential breeding records for the Whooper Swan in the UK have been collated by the Rare Breeding Birds Panel (RBBP) and included in their annual reports (Sharrock *et al.* 1980 et seq.). Throughout the 1980s, the record was confused by the presence of naturalised populations of captive origin, as well as a number of injured birds, some of which found partners, either naturalised or wild birds - even, occasionally, with a Mute Swan *Cygnus olor* - and attempted to breed. The amount of 'noise' thereby generated made it difficult to discern what was happening in the wild population. The RBBP report for 1985 commented "The status hardly changes from year to year" (Spencer *et al.* 1988), and the 1989 record count of 2–9 nests was dismissed as "Much ado about nothing" (Spencer *et al.* 1991). This situation was largely resolved in 1996, when these reports were filtered by the RBBP into a separate 'non-natives report' initially published annually but from 2003 covering three calendar years.

By the mid-1990s, it was becoming clear that a slow, but sustained, upturn in the breeding status was in progress. Whilst still very rare, nests were reported in various years from Perth & Kinross, Argyll, Highland, Caithness, Outer Hebrides, Orkney and, most consistently, in Shetland (Pennington *et al.* 2004), where nesting has occurred annually since 1994. The number of nests reported to RBBP reached double figures (13) in 2007, and 20+ three years later. By 2014, the running five-year mean for the UK had reached 23.2 nesting attempts per annum.

This note documents the regular occupation and annual breeding success at a site in south-west Scotland which has been active from the early stages of this development.

Breeding habitat

In May 1991, a pair of Whooper Swans was found to be settled on a remote upland loch (Loch A) in the Galloway Forest Park in Ayrshire. A nest was built, and the birds appeared to be incubating; however, no young were seen. The chosen loch was of moderate size (less than 10 ha) but was linked to a much larger loch (Loch B) by a short watercourse. Occupying a shallow basin in undulating acid grassland, the loch appeared to be at an advanced stage in the succession towards a swamp habitat. In summer, less than 50% of the surface area comprised open water. The greater part of the site was well-vegetated, providing grazing and security, even for a fully-grown swan (Plate 22). So dense was this cover that it was not always possible to determine the number of cygnets present, nor, occasionally, whether a brood was present at all. The natural seclusion of the site was augmented by closed-canopy planted conifers, which effectively discouraged casual disturbance.

First successful breeding

The loch was deserted through the winter, but the birds returned in the spring of 1992 and refurbished the nest; this time at least two cygnets were seen but were not confirmed to fledge. A third failure in the following year resulted from a rising water level flooding the nest (Plate 23); the birds remained in the area for the rest of the summer, moving to a nearby loch to moult. In the winter a tractor tyre was manoeuvred into the nest site and laid on its side, to provide an elevated platform for the nest. The 1994 nest, like most subsequent efforts, was constructed on the tyre and three young fledged later in the season. Thereafter, breeding success was consistently high, with fledging confirmed in 16 seasons (59%) and possible in a further six (22%) (Table 1). A minimum of 38 young swans fledged between 1994 and 2017; successful broods averaged 2.38 young (range 1–4).

Plate 23. The 1993 nest was abandoned after heavy rain caused a rise in the water level of the breeding loch which flooded the nest. © *Geoff Shaw*

Table 1. Frequency of breeding and annual productivity at a Whooper Swan nesting site in Ayrshire, 1991–2017. Notes: [1] Most sightings were on Lochs A, where regular nesting took place, and B (0.5 km from Loch A). A & B were linked by a channel, along which the birds sometimes moved unfledged young. [2] In addition to the established pair, birds were noted in the breeding season at eight other sites: Lochs C (1.2 km from Loch A at nearest point), D (3.8 km), E (6.6 km), F (13.5 km), G (12.0 km), H (3.8 km), I (2.1 km) and J (5.7 km). Note that none of these sites was monitored on an annual basis; records were the product of random visits.

	Loch A/B occupation[1]	Success or failure	Number of fledged young	Notes[2]
1991	Pair	Failed	0	First recent breeding record: no sign of hatch
1992	Pair	?	0? (2)	At least 2 half-grown cygnets; fledging uncertain
1993	Pair	Failed	0	Nest and eggs flooded; birds moulted at Loch C
1994	Pair	Success	3	First young reared in 4th year of breeding
1995	Pair	Success?	?	Adults agitated; brood possible under cover
1996	Pair	Success	4	
1997	Pair	Success	1	
1998	Pair	Success	4	
1999	Pair	Success	2	
2000	Pair	Success	4	2nd pair nested Loch D; failed
2001	Pair	?	?	Access restricted due to Foot & Mouth Disease
2002	Pair	?	?	Adults agitated; brood possible under cover
2003	Pair	Success	2	2nd pair visited several lochs; last seen Loch J (July)
2004	Pair	Success	1	
2005	Pair	Success	1	Pair Loch C (July)
2006	Pair	Failed	0	Pair moulting on Loch C (July); no young present
2007	Pair	?	?	Adults agitated (July); single Loch D (August)
2008	Pair	Success	4	Pair Loch E (May); possible migrants?
2009	Pair	Success	2	Pair Loch D (March); possible migrants?
2010	Pair	Success	3	
2011	Pair?	?	?	Pair on Loch D early in spring; flew to Loch I
2012	Pair	Failed?	0	4 adults on Loch F (June)
2013	Pair	Success	2	
2014	Pair	Success	1	Pair Loch G (June & August)
2015	Pair	Success	3	Pair Loch G (August)
2016	Pair	Success	1	2 pairs on Loch F (June)
2017	Pair?	Failed	0	Birds moulted at Loch H; pair Loch G (May–June)

Dispersal

Nothing is known about where the birds were spending the winter, but the early stages of dispersal were consistent from year to year. A successful breeding episode was concluded In August or September, when the breeding pair had completed their moult, the young were capable of independent flight and the family unit moved away from the breeding site. Initially they made brief visits to some of the several lochs and larger watercourses in the area, but were gone by the time the migrant Whoopers began to appear in November. No swans spent the winter in these upland sites, which were frequently frozen over - although small parties of presumed Icelandic birds might drop in for a day during mild spells. The breeding pair became re-established sometime in April, with the earliest return date for an apparently paired couple being 28 March. Whooper Swans wintering in Scotland feed on low-lying, rich fields that have been cropped for agriculture, such as those found along the Inner Solway coastal plain, less than 50 km south-east of the breeding loch. To reach these same wintering grounds, the birds breeding in Iceland have to undertake a journey of at least 1,400 km, making the longest-known regular direct flight over water by any species, twice a year.

Recruitment

The Ayrshire breeding site has been monitored for 27 years - from 1991 to 2017 - during which time it was re-occupied each spring. The longevity record for a Whooper Swan is 28 years but the typical lifespan is just nine years (*www.bto.org.uk/birdfacts)* so it seems probable that there has been contact with other flocks in winter, to source replacements for natural losses. As the pool of locally bred

birds accumulated, there were indications that some have returned to the natal area. Ten years on from the first confirmed breeding attempt, there were signs of consolidation. In 2000, a second pair built a nest on a nearby loch and appeared to start incubation, although the attempt failed. Since then, a second pair has been present in the area in eight years, with two extra pairs in two seasons (Table 1). Small groups of 1–3 birds have occasionally appeared in an adjacent valley in early summer. The Galloway Forest Park includes nearly 200 mapped lochs (larger than 0.5 ha), many of which are remote and difficult to access and as a result are seldom visited. Nevertheless, up until 2017 the known population increase was limited to an increased number of summering birds.

Discussion

Arguably, the most significant feature of this episode is its persistence. From the middle of the 19th century, breeding attempts in Scotland were infrequent, short-lived and tended to be attributed to the aberrant behaviour of unfit individuals. Towards the end of the 20th century, however, the annual totals started to increase , while on Shetland, in particular, but also in the Outer Hebrides, North-west Highlands and Argyll, regular sites became established , where breeding was frequent, if not annual, and the location became the focus, rather than the individual birds. The site in the south-west follows this pattern.

To put the Scottish situation in context, Whooper breeding populations have been buoyant in northern Europe since the mid-20th century. The midwinter international census of the Icelandic population in January 2015 returned a total of 34,004, 16% higher than the previous (2010) count and 155% of the 15,842 found as recently as 1995 (Hall *et al.* 2016). The drivers for this increase are not fully understood, but may include an expansion in suitable breeding habitat in Iceland, in response to an increase in vegetation cover resulting from the sustained increase in temperature over the last three decades, as reported by Raynolds *et al.* (2015). Over the same period, the North-west European population, nesting in more enclosed situations (forest bogs) in Scandinavia and northern mainland Europe, has extended to recover former breeding grounds, largely at the southern edge of the range, where legal protection has helped to promote the recovery of ground that was lost to hunting, trapping and egg collecting from the mid-19th century onwards.

Boiko & Kampe-Persson (2010) reviewed this expansion; breeding has resumed in Latvia (1973), Germany (1985), Denmark (2002), Hungary (2005) and was close in the Netherlands (2010), while the size of the breeding population has increased from 20 pairs (1938) to about 3,800 in southern Sweden (1999), from 15 pairs (1949) to 4,600–6,000 in Finland (2004) and from one pair (1973) to c.260 in Latvia. Most recently, Whooper Swans have nested in Ireland and Wales, and quite unexpectedly from 2012 at the Dombes reserve, north of Lyon in eastern France, fully 1,000 km south-west of the closest established breeding population (Benmergui *et al.* 2012). Marked birds from northern Europe have wintered in the UK and Ireland, and are predicted to increase as the breeding range expands. The loch used by the Ayrshire birds recalls the forest bogs, rather than the more open habitats found in Iceland, raising the possibility that the recent establishment of regular breeding in the British Isles is in fact a part of the on-going expansion of birds of northern European origin, rather than Iceland.

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Oystercatchers in Mid Deeside, North-east Scotland, in 2009–17 - numbers, breeding and effects of cold spells

D. JENKINS

Oystercatchers were counted approximately twice weekly from a car on a circuit of flood plains in Mid Deeside from 2009–17, and some results were compared with a previous study in 2006 on a neighbouring Finzean farm and an associated glen. In both studies, the proportion of potential breeders which nested and breeding success were low, but they were much better in the glen visited in 2006 than on the flood plains later. Prolonged effects of cold snaps in early spring that may weaken birds, together with predation and drainage in spring, are suggested as possible causes of breeding failure.

Introduction

I counted Oystercatchers *Haematopus ostralegus* in 2009–17 from a car about twice each week usually on a defined circuit of c.75 km around two flood plains of the River Dee near Tarland/Coull/Lumphanan but in 2009 around the Tarland flood plain only (Figure 1). I did not mark any birds and the counts were done concurrently with a study of Lapwings *Vanellus vanellus* (Jenkins 2017). Oystercatchers were mostly seen in March–July along the main valley (the strath) of the river, including the study area, on open agricultural land and rushy pastures near wetlands and

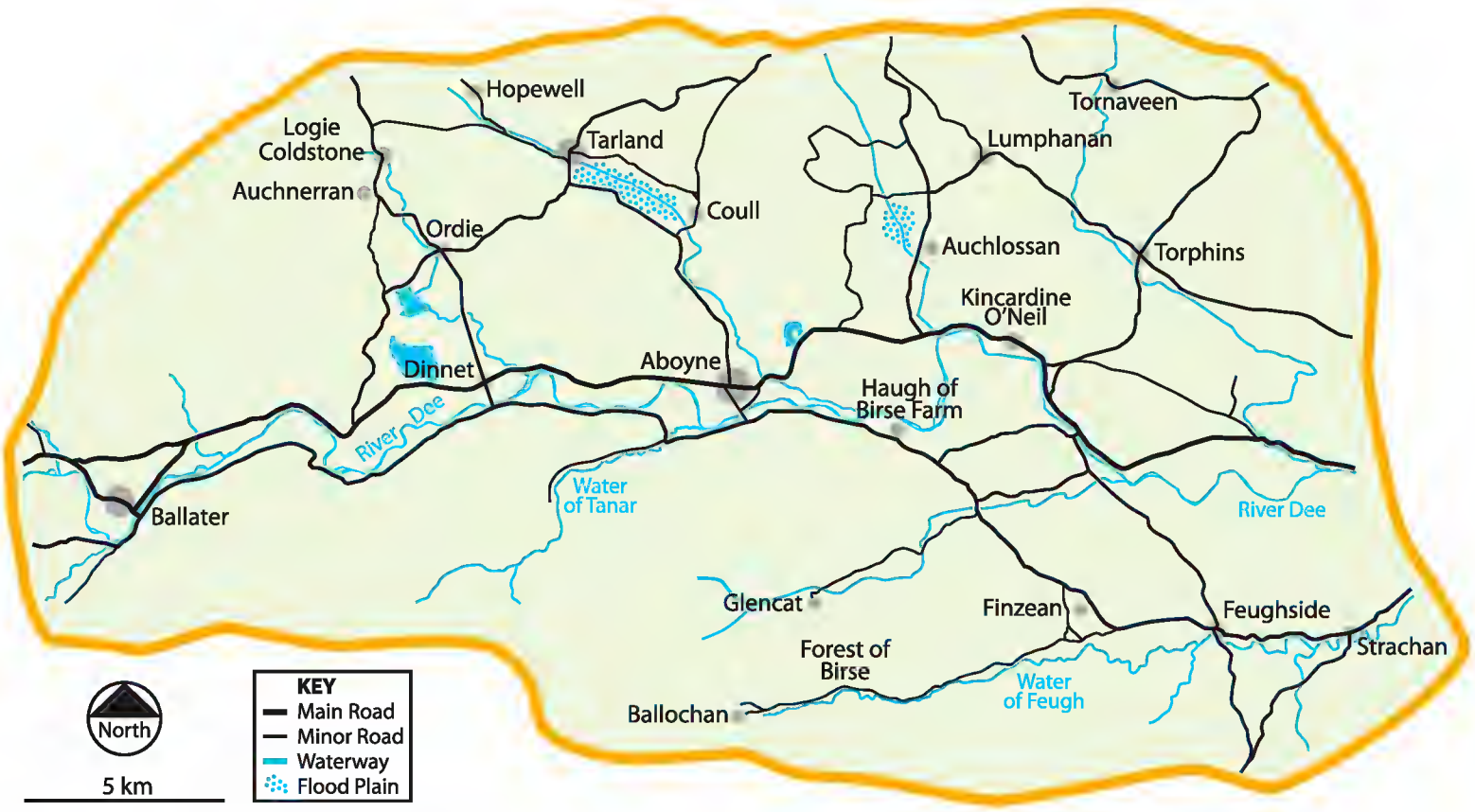

Figure 1. Mid Deeside, showing principal roads, minor roads and main waterways.

Table 1. Numbers of Oystercatchers seen each month in Mid Deeside 2009–17 (2009 Tarland only). †A single bird was also seen on 13 September 2012.

	Cumulative total (no. of visits)							Mean number seen per visit						
	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug
2009	5 (5)	147 (19)	59 (17)	127 (10)	111 (6)	39 (14)	0 (10)	1.0	7.7	3.5	12.7	18.5	2.8	0.0
2010	2 (1)	102 (11)	208 (14)	264 (16)	150 (10)	75 (10)	0 (5)	2.0	9.3	14.9	16.5	15.0	7.5	0.0
2011	0 (0)	239 (15)	149 (15)	13 (4)	12 (5)	150 (14)	6 (13)	0.0	15.9	9.9	3.3	2.4	10.7	0.5
2012†	2 (1)	320 (22)	177 (15)	91 (13)	35 (10)	99 (12)	85 (19)	2.0	14.5	11.8	7.0	3.5	8.3	4.5
2013	0 (0)	197 (14)	152 (17)	32 (15)	24 (6)	220 (15)	10 (7)	0.0	14.1	8.9	2.1	4.0	14.7	1.4
2014	60 (12)	115 (14)	76 (14)	33 (11)	325 (11)	87 (9)	3 (9)	5.0	8.2	5.4	3.0	29.5	9.7	0.3
2015	22 (1)	274 (9)	65 (8)	63 (8)	75 (8)	226 (9)	1 (8)	22.0	30.4	8.1	7.9	9.4	25.1	0.1
2016	9 (8)	97 (8)	81 (8)	55 (10)	129 (9)	253 (7)	24 (8)	1.1	12.1	10.1	5.5	14.3	36.1	3.0
2017	50 (2)	406 (9)	147 (6)	42 (9)	72 (7)	282 (8)	7 (9)	25.0	45.1	24.5	4.7	10.3	35.3	0.8
Total	150 (30)	1897 (121)	1114 (114)	720 (96)	933 (72)	1431 (98)	136 (88)							
Mean per visit	5.0	15.7	9.8	7.5	13.0	14.6	1.5							

also on hill farms in two local Birse glens: Forest of Birse and Glen Cat, which were predominately heathery or grassy (Figure 1). Birds fed widely but selectively near wet places across the area, often gathering at irregular temporary roosts such as Haugh of Birse farm on the River Dee and also (as reported by bird ringers) at localities just outside the study area where relatively large numbers of Oystercatchers roosted in March. These main roosts were on river banks at Hopewell near Tarland (>350 birds) and near Ballater (c.250–300). A total of c.300 birds has so far been caught and ringed at these places, with many also dyed at Ballater (H.I. Scott pers. comm., Duncan 2013, 2014).

Aspects of this 2009–17 study in Mid Deeside are also compared with a one-year study of Oystercatchers and other wading birds in Finzean parish in 2006 (Pout 2006). This parish included intensively farmed land at Finzean in the mid valley of the Water of Feugh, a large tributary of the Dee, and also the upper Feugh valley or glen with its hill farm, Ballochan, in the Forest of Birse. Ballochan was managed jointly with its neighbouring glen, Glen Cat. Both hill farms grew some crops, following a similar rotation between years, but were mainly pasture abutting on to heather moor managed for game shooting. Some Oystercatchers and other wading birds were found on the open hill but they mainly frequented the enclosed fields. Numbers of Foxes *Vulpes vulpes*, Carrion Crows *Corvus corone*, and other predators were intensively controlled at Finzean and in the neighbouring glens, but up to 2014, when game management changed, much less intensively on my study area on the farms in the Mid Deeside flood plains.

Until March 2017, no ringed Oystercatcher was seen in Mid Deeside despite the hundreds marked at the nearby roosts and despite searches for them near Tarland and Lumphanan (H.I. Scott pers. comm.). This contrasts with sightings in Upper Deeside of about one-third of 88 birds dyed at Ballater, made along the river and in the neighbouring western glens (Duncan 2014). This suggests that Oystercatchers in spring in Mid (the strath) and Upper (the western glens) Deeside were mostly from different cohorts or populations.

The study period included a very cold snap in March 2013 as a result of which many Oystercatchers starved to death in Mid Deeside (Duncan 2013).

Numbers

Away from roosts, most Oystercatchers in Mid Deeside occurred in pairs or small flocks in which apparently paired birds were usually distinguishable. On average, 63% and 19% of the flocks were groups of 1–10 and 11–20 birds respectively. Only 7% of flocks were of more than 40 birds (Tables 1 and 2). These larger groups were usually seen once and not again and are hereafter referred to as *migrants*. Some were

Table 2. Frequency of flocks of different sizes (%) of Oystercatchers seen in Mid Deeside in 2009–17 (2009 Tarland only).

	Number of birds per flock									
	1–10	11–20	21–30	31–40	41–50	51–60	61–70	71–80	>80	Total
2009	50 (79)	7 (11)	4 (6)			1 (2)	1 (2)			63
2010	29 (52)	13 (23)	8 (14)	4 (7)	1 (2)			1 (2)		56
2011	36 (74)	4 (8)	5 (10)	2 (4)	1 (2)				1 (2)	49
2012	54 (64)	21 (25)	6 (7)	2 (2)		1 (1)				84
2013	42 (70)	13 (22)	1 (2)	2 (3)				1 (2)	1 (2)	60
2014	42 (71)	9 (15)	3 (5)	2 (3)				2 (3)	1 (2)	59
2015	22 (52)	11 (26)	3 (7)	1 (2)	1 (2)	1 (2)	1 (2)		2 (5)	42
2016	28 (60)	10 (21)	5 (11)	1 (2)	2 (4)				1 (2)	47
2017	18 (43)	8 (19)	4 (10)	3 (7)	1 (2)	2 (5)	2 (5)	4 (10)		42

seen in March and July and were presumed to be on the way to or from unknown localities. Others occurred in summer, not only on the study area but also around it, including during the nesting season when Oystercatchers in groups of varying sizes flew noisily over Aboyne village and hills between glens as well as over the study area where I counted, for example, 60–61 birds in May–June 2009, 79 birds in June 2010, and 90 in June 2014 (bold type in Table 3) when nesting birds might be assumed to move least. These relatively large flocks presumably contained failed- or non-breeders.

The smallest groups of 1–10 birds include some seen regularly in the same place and were considered to be *territorial*. Some nested. Other birds were more mobile including groups sized at 11–20 birds (Table 2). I call them *transients* because they were often absent but apparently recurred regularly on the study area in similar-sized groups, suggesting that the same birds may have been circulating round a larger area, including places such as Aboyne village, of which my study was only part. Oystercatchers occurred widely elsewhere on agricultural land in Mid Deeside, including, for example, the farm at Auchnerran on the edge of hills a few km west of Tarland. Here, the Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust counted Oystercatchers on 480 ha, recording 37 in 2015 and 84 in 2016 (GWCT 2017 and Marlies Nicolai pers. comm.).

Table 1 suggests a pattern of increased incidence in February and August in recent years. The Oystercatcher season (defined as the period from first to last observation) varied between 151 and 197 days, but has increased significantly (Spearman correlation with year, r_S=0.703, P=0.028).

Breeding

In Mid Deeside, counts in April (Tables 1 and 3) give an idea of the numbers of local transient plus territorial birds. Counts in May were generally lower than in April and may suggest numbers of territorial birds nesting (though these figures were variable and liable to confusion from the presence or varying dates of final departures of transient birds). These May counts were often about 10 or fewer, corresponding to a maximum of five nests known in any year (Table 3 final columns). Unsuccessful searches for nests (i.e. no nests were found) of other apparently territorial Oystercatchers led to the conclusion that these might be non-breeders.

Presumably, some apparently non-breeding Mid Deeside birds could have failed early in incubation or might have nested unsuccessfully elsewhere. When nesting in open farmland, off-duty Oystercatchers are obvious, especially in young crops or pasture in April or May, and while a few nesting birds might have been missed, probably they were rather few. Prolonged mobbing of people at a probable nest site in Mid Deeside in two years suggested that nesting had occurred there, and the persistence for more than two weeks of pairs of Oystercatchers in crops at other sites also suggested nesting and temporary incubation which was unsuccessful in all cases. I assume that most territorial birds seen repeatedly but in less than two weeks in

Table 3. Maximum counts of Oystercatcher in the study area in half-month periods 2009–17 (2009 Tarland only). Presumed migrants are in bold. The final columns show the estimated numbers of nests and of territorial pairs in May. All nests were unsuccessful and no juveniles were seen. † A single bird was also seen on 13 September 2012.

	1–15 Feb	16–28 Feb	1–15 Mar	16–31 Mar	1–15 Apr	16–30 Apr	1–15 May	16–31 May	1–15 Jun	16–30 Jun	1–15 Jul	16–31 Jul	1–15 Aug	16–31 Aug	No. of territorial pairs	Estimated no. of nests
2009	0	4	26	22	13	14	**61**	29	21	**60**	12	3	0	0	4	0
2010	0	2	24	25	35	23	44	20	17	**79**	33	33	0	0	5	3
2011	0	0	0	**115**	31	32	4	4	4	3	21	43	4	0	2	0
2012†	0	2	**55**	35	35	15	20	10	3	12	30	30	20	5	4	2
2013	0	0	40	31	17	23	8	2	9	5	**82**	11	8	0	2	0
2014	13	20	35	16	9	11	7	5	10	**90**	24	12	3	0	3	1
2015	0	22	**94**	26	10	15	9	17	14	13	53	**63**	1	0	0	0
2016	1	6	36	23	22	14	10	8	10	29	**105**	17	9	5	1	0
2017	0	29	**70**	**80**	54	19	14	3	7	39	**77**	**75**	6	0	4	1

approximately the same places were non-breeders. Some could have been robbed but these birds were not in exactly the same places and no nest could be found on searches. Data in this study (Table 3) suggest that over the nine years (all data combined) only seven pairs nested out of the total of 25 territorial pairs observed. This proportion (28%) is less than in Pout's (2006) study at Finzean (see below) in which 37 pairs (64%) nested out of 58 pairs on territory (see also Jenkins 2013, p.74). Nonetheless, the similar biology apparently underlying the two studies justifies the assumption that some birds in Mid Deeside were territorial but did not lay. Clearly, however, a much more detailed field study is desirable to check the hypothesis.

No nesting attempt on my study area was successful, contrasting with Pout who recorded many fledged juveniles in 2006 at both Finzean (0.6 fledged young per nesting attempt) and Ballochan (1.0 young per attempt).

In the varied landscape of Finzean and Ballochan, Pout found that twice as many Oystercatcher chicks were fledged on pastures as on all other crop types. Most losses were of fledged chicks. However, in 2006 only about half of 32 nests (43.7%) in Finzean farmland reared at least one young compared with all the young in four nests which hatched at Ballochan. From these data, breeding in Pout's study in 2006, particularly at Ballochan, was much better than in the strath in Mid Deeside in 2009–17 when no juvenile Oystercatcher was seen anywhere.

The most likely cause was loss of eggs to nest predators, confirmed once as by Carrion Crows, because numbers of predators were not intensively controlled in Mid Deeside up to 2014 when management changed. Contrasting with few killed in earlier years, in the four springs/early summers 2014–17, local gamekeepers killed c.150 Foxes and more than 500 Carrion Crows on the 'Sportings' at Tarland, including this part of my Mid Deeside study area (R. Paterson pers. comm.). Obviously, there were a great many potential egg predators in the Tarland area.

Effects of cold snaps

In 2013, Oystercatchers stayed in Mid Deeside through a prolonged cold snap lasting from 10 March to 9 April. The ground was frozen throughout this period, with minimum temperature -12.9°C (at Aboyne) and intermittent periods with lying snow. Soon afterwards, 33 emaciated Oystercatcher carcases were recovered near the Hopewell and Ballater roosts (Duncan 2014). This was the coldest March mean monthly temperature recorded in the Met Office's 'Scotland East' since 1962, but there was a similar cold snap, again with heavy Oystercatcher mortality, in March 1979 (Watson 1980). Watson

recorded that surviving birds showed reduced display and delayed incubation, and it is reasonable to conclude that Oystercatchers surviving prolonged cold snaps may be physiologically weakened.

Discussion

The presence and daily movements of so many transient birds is unusual and needs explanation. Their numbers varied throughout the season (see Table 3 for monthly maxima) and were least in the nesting time in May, though up to 17 transients were recorded in 2015 when no nests were found. This suggests that numbers nesting and numbers of transient birds may have varied concurrently. I do not recall frequently seeing mobile groups of transients in Forest of Birse in Feughside in 1987–2006 when I counted birds there (Jenkins & Watson 1999, original data deposited with Birse Community Trust, Finzean) though single birds flew daily between Ballochan and Finzean, presumably on lengthy feeding trips. Pout (2006) does not mention transient flocks and these may be a feature of Oystercatcher behaviour on agricultural land as contrasted with birds in glens. In Mid Deeside, agricultural farmland is typified in early spring by small wet places at which waterfowl and waders are daily seen feeding. Presumably, such favoured places with damp soils contain accessible invertebrates, encouraging waders to settle and become territorial. Later in the spring, these damp places usually disappeared due to dry weather and frequent drainage attempts by farmers following which agricultural land became less suitable for waders. Such drainage was done annually in the Tarland Burn, frequently at Auchlossan, and in spring/early summer 2017 of a pool previously excellent for waterfowl at Coull (Figure 1) so that it became completely dry and birdless. If the birds stay in a drained area, Oystercatcher behaviour may then change from residence to transience. In contrast, in glens, wet places such as stream sides and bogs tended to be long-lasting or permanent features so that Oystercatchers could stay resident in the same places throughout the breeding season and not become transient. This idea might be tested by marking birds and comparing their movements in the different habitats. Flocks of non-breeders on other nesting areas are recorded by others including Pout (2006) in Deeside and by Harris (1970) in Wales. In his study on Skokholm Island in Pembrokeshire, Harris (1970) showed that one non-breeding bird in such a flock had nested in a previous year and, through removal experiments, that other birds in adult plumage in the non-breeding flock were capable of breeding but were inhibited from doing so in that year by territorial behaviour by established breeders. Such flocks described by Harris and Pout, and similar small numbers also located in this study, were, however, usually sedentary, contrasting with the mobile flocks of transients described above in Mid Deeside.

Survival of a breeding population of Oystercatchers on the Mid Deeside flood plains may depend at least partly on immigration resulting from successful breeding elsewhere, perhaps in the glens, including the Game Conservancy's experimental farm at Auchnerran, and paralleling the situation in Lapwings (Jenkins 2017). In his major study of the Grey Partridge *Perdix perdix*, Potts (2012) emphasised that nest and chick predation may limit stocks of partridges, and this conclusion may apply similarly to Oystercatchers. Some bad effects of mechanised agriculture have also been described for Mid Deeside (Jenkins 2017) and long-term effects of cold snaps in early spring are another factor that may also be locally damaging.

What effect did the 2013 cold snap have on the Oystercatcher population? Evidence from ringing (Duncan 2017) for six birds marked at Ballater shows that three birds ringed in April 2012 (before the cold spell) and another three ringed in March 2014 (after it) all survived the unusually prolonged frost and migrated south- or south-westwards, as might be expected. These survivals elicited Duncan's comment that the cold snap "didn't impact too drastically on this mid-Deeside population". This population was presumably in Deeside's western glens because so few ringed birds have yet been seen in Mid Deeside (so far, just one at Wester Coull on the edge of the plain on 6 and 22 March 2017).

Numbers of Oystercatchers counted on my circuits were lowest in 2013 and 2014 (Table 1) and, correspondingly, fewer territorial pairs and nests were estimated following spring 2013 (see above and Table 3) although the number of territorial pairs 'recovered' to 4 in 2017. These observations suggest some effects of the 2013 cold snap, but overall the counts of Oystercatchers in Table 1 agree with Duncan and show remarkably few effects of this cold snap, except perhaps temporarily for the first few years. The total failure over nine years of paired Oystercatchers to rear any young on this area is nonetheless surprising and suggests that the Mid Deeside flood plains, as contrasted with the glens, should be regarded as unsustainable habitat. Further research is desirable to elaborate details of cause and effect on bird populations vulnerable to periodic cold spells, exacerbating effects of mechanised agriculture and the constant risk of predation.

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Brünnich's Guillemot, Anstruther, 2016: postscript

The finding of Fife's first record of Brünnich's Guillemot *Uria lomvia* in September 2016 at Anstruther, Fife was reported in detail by Lauder & Shaw (2017). First sighted on 25 September, the bird was found dead on the 30th, its behaviour having been noted by the authors as suggesting it was 'never in the best of health'. For example, its plumage was ragged and its eyes appeared half-closed (K.D. Shaw pers. comm.).

The corpse was subsequently passed to National Museums Scotland (NMS) where it was prepared as a skin (accession number NMS.Z 2017.154). The stomach contained a strip of white silicone sealant (Plate 24), consistent with a piece of bathroom or window sealant. The strip (96 mm in length and up to 8 mm in width) had a mass of 0.97 g and appeared to block the posterior end of the stomach. The stomach contained no food items, but was full of roundworms (Nematoda), approximately 250–300 in number. Such parasitic infections can result in loss of weight, listlessness and loss of plumage, with ill health and death often attributed to extremely high parasite burdens (Campbell & Lack 1985).

At preparation, the bird was sexed as a male and its weight noted as 622 g. Mean weight of samples of male Brünnich's Guillemots range from 957 g (from Greenland, Bear Island, Spitzbergen) to 989 g (from Murmansk) and 1,027 g (from Novaya Zemlya) (Cramp 1985); the Anstruther bird's weight was therefore c. 63% of that expected for a typical male.

Ingestion by seabirds of marine debris in the form of plastic, rubber or rubberized silicone may have a number of deleterious effects, including blockage of the gut, appetite suppression, reduced dietary efficiency and increased levels of persistent organic pollutants (Provencher *et al.* 2010, Bond *et al.* 2013). Although the mass of the silicone strip (0.97 g) perhaps appears insignificant, this was 600 times the mean mass of plastic debris recorded in sample of Brünnich's Guillemots from Canada (Provencher *et al.* 2010). It seems reasonable to assume that the silicone contributed to the bird's decline in health.

As noted above, the bird was a male. An earlier investigation of the sex ratio of a sample of 17

Plate 24. Strip of silicone sealant from the stomach of a Brünnich's Guillemot found dead at Anstruther, Fife, 30 September 2016. © *NMS*

Brünnich's Guillemot corpses from Scotland showed 23.5% as male and 76.5% as female (McGowan *et al.* 2013). With the inclusion of the Anstruther bird, the proportions are now 27.8% male and 72.2% female; there is no statistical bias towards females.

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Golden Eagles predating Meadow Pipit nests

On 12 June 2017, JCB visited a Golden Eagle *Aquila chrysaetos* nest near Ullapool in the North-west Highlands, as part of the Highland Raptor Study Group's monitoring programme. During previous checks at this site the chicks were being fed what might be considered normal prey. In 2014, Ptarmigan *Lagopus muta* and in 2015 Red Grouse *Lagopus lagopus*, Red Deer *Cervus elaphus* calf and Mountain Hare *Lepus timidus*. This year the nest contained two well grown eaglets (weighing 2400 and 3400 g) and an assortment of these normally expected prey items including a Mountain Hare, Red Grouse, but also two Meadow Pipit *Anthus pratensis* nests including at least two chicks at the pin stage of development, though only one features in Plate 25.

The site of this eyrie falls well within Ecological Region 5 as listed in Watson's monograph on the Golden Eagle and as such may be regarded as less favourable in terms of the climate and prey availability than east Highland Ecological Regions (Watson 1997). Watson suggested that such prey diversity while an indicator of the Golden Eagle's flexibility and ability to exploit all available prey sources is not necessarily a sign that all is well in terms of prey availability. In Ecological Region 5 the North-west Highlands miscellaneous items formed up to 15% of the diet of Golden Eagles as determined from pellet analyses (Watson 1997).

We can find two previous reports of Meadow Pipits as prey in Golden Eagle nests and the first of these by Lea MacNally is identical to that reported here in that it involved an empty nest which had almost certainly contained fledglings found among the contents of an occupied eagle eyrie (MacNally 1977). The second case involved one of the birds taken from a nest for the Irish relocation programme which Lorcan O'Toole (pers. comm.) noted appeared to have been fed extensively on Meadow Pipits. In spite of a change and improvement of diet after being removed for the relocation programme, that eaglet failed to regain normal size and condition before release. These two occurrences both fell within Ecological Region 6 near Fort Augustus, which

Plate 25. Two Meadow Pipit nests and one of at least two chicks found in a Golden Eagle nest near Ullapool, Highland, June 2017. © *Jonathan Brain*

as with our case, is in the North-west Highlands. Roy Dennis who kindly drew our attention to these two records observed what must be the extreme of prey sourcing by a Golden Eagle in Glen Affric during the 1980s when he watched an eagle running around on the ground beside a loch picking items from the ground. When he reached the spot, he found the ground thick with mating Common Frogs *Rana temporaria* which had almost certainly been the subject of the eagle's attention (R.H. Dennis pers. comm.).

These observations back up Watson's assertion that live prey for breeding Golden Eagles may be limited in the North-west Highlands.

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Seasonality of North-east Scotland's Common Scoters

While describing trends in scoter numbers in Fife, Elkins (2017) states that, "large scoter flocks off North-east Scotland peak in autumn". This is not actually the case. The largest scoter numbers visible from land in North-east Scotland are seen off the Blackdog and Murcar coast, just north of Aberdeen. Since 2004, I have counted or estimated the number present here, throughout the year, often several times each month. Although Common Scoters *Melanitta nigra* are present on most visits, numbers typically build up here in late May and through June. The peak count of the year has been in June in three of the past 14 years, in July in seven of those years and in August in four years. Numbers fall steadily through September and October with, usually, tens or low hundreds present in other months of the year (Figure 1).

As in Fife, numbers at Blackdog and Murcar fluctuate substantially from year to year, and even from visit to visit, with birds dispersing to areas out of sight at times and sea conditions often hamper counts. However, with a single observer assessing numbers (thereby reducing the variability associated with multiple observers), usually several times per month, and taking just the peak count, the broad seasonal trends in numbers using the wider area become apparent.

Peak numbers at Blackdog and Murcar have shown no clear trend over this 14-year period. The peak annual count has ranged from a high of 3,600 in 2004 to a low of 1,200 in 2015, though this was immediately followed by two years in which peak counts exceeded 3,000. Some higher counts were made prior to 2004, notably 4,000+ on 25 May 1992, 4,750 at the end of July 1994 and 4,300 on 24 August 2002 (*North-East Scotland Bird Reports* 1992, 1994, 2002). These hint at the possibility of an overall fall in numbers subsequently, though it is difficult to be certain of this without consistency in recorder effort and methods.

Winter 2017/18 will see the erection of 11 wind turbines off the coast from Blackdog, south past Murcar, to Don mouth. The turbines will

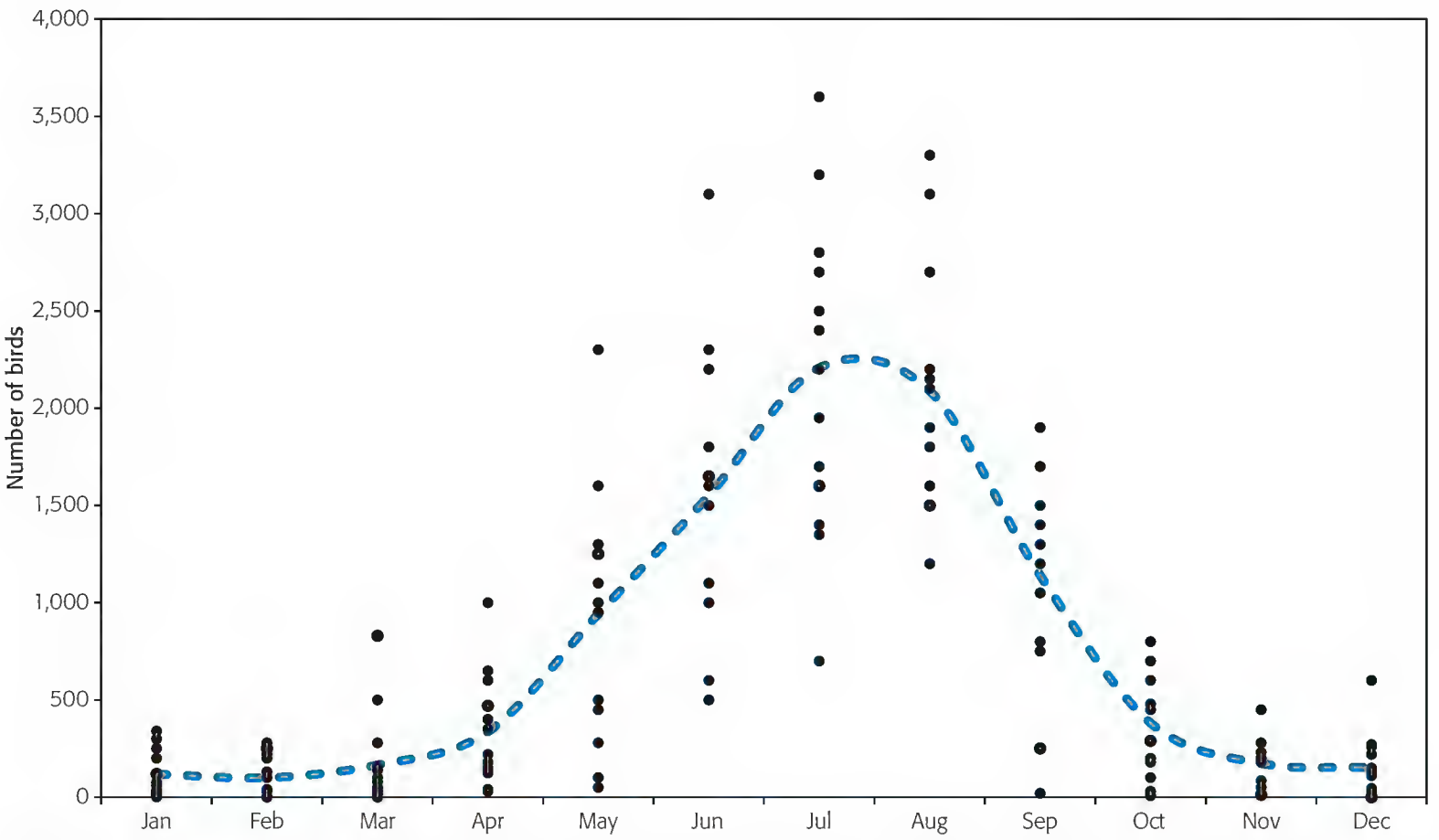

Figure 1. Common Scoter numbers at Blackdog and Murcar, North-east Scotland, January 2004 to October 2017. Each point represents the highest count or estimate made that month and the dotted line shows the mean trend through the year. No data points are shown for six months in which no count was made.

be 191 m at their highest point and positioned between 2 and 3 km from land. It is not known what impact, if any, these will have on scoter numbers but a continuation of systematic counts should enable detection of large scale or long-term changes in the birds' use of the area.

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An offset metal grid thwarts predators of birds nesting in nest boxes

Results of a 23-year study of Crested Tits *Lophophanes cristatus* breeding in nest boxes at Culbin Forest, Moray & Nairn, showed that breeding success declined after the mid-1990s, largely due to predation by Pine Martens *Martes martes*, which presumably colonised the area during this period (Taylor *et al.* 2016). The breeding success was so low that it was deemed that the productivity could not sustain the nest box population.

In an attempt to make nest boxes safer from predation, 72 boxes at Culbin were fitted with an offset metal grid in 2016. The design was as follows. A metal grid with an internal mesh size of 22.5 mm square and gauge of 3 mm was cut and bent into a cube shape with flanges extending out from the sides. The flanges were screwed onto the nest box to attach it onto the box. This meant that birds had to enter the box by first passing through the grid which was offset from the box by 58 mm. It was assumed that the grid would make it difficult for Pine Martens to gain access through the nest entrance.

In 2016, 12 boxes with offset grids were used by Blue Tits *Cyanistes caeruleus,* Coal Tits *Periparus ater* and Crested Tits. Blue Tits laid clutches in seven boxes, two of which had hatched by the time of the last visit to Culbin (24 May). Coal Tits laid in three boxes and two clutches hatched. Crested Tits used two boxes; both clutches hatched and the chicks were ringed. Observations did not extend to the end of the breeding season, so fledging success was not determined, but there was no indication of predation at any of the boxes.

In 2017, 18 boxes were used, 13 by Blue Tits and five by Coal Tits. Eleven of the Blue Tit clutches hatched. One clutch was reduced from seven eggs to one egg around the point of hatching but no chicks were noted. A large flea burden may have been responsible for loss of chicks at hatching. The other box with unhatched eggs contained a bird sitting on a single egg on 24 May. This may have been the beginning of a second or replacement clutch. One brood was reduced from seven to two chicks with the five dead chicks remaining in the nest. This was thought to have been caused by the nest becoming wet during heavy rainfall. Adults continued to feed the surviving chicks. All five Coal Tit clutches hatched by the end of May. One brood died, again due to wetting during heavy rain. All others survived to an age that allowed ringing, and one brood had fledged by the 30 May. As in the previous year, there was no signs of predation, such as dismembered fragments of birds (Taylor *et al.* 2016).

Two Bushnell automatic cameras were set at two of the nests to record any predation attempts in 2017. Both boxes were visited by Pine Martens (on two occasions at one box and once at the other) and Jays *Garrulus glandarius* (once at both boxes) (Plates 26 and 27). The Pine Martens climbed to the boxes and inspected the nest entrance but made no clear attempts to access the box, such as putting a paw through the grid. Likewise, the Jays just inspected the nest box. It would seem that the grid effectively stopped these predators accessing the box. All of the losses that occurred could be attributed to other causes.

Plate 26. A Pine Marten sitting on top of a nest box with an offset grid and occupied by Blue Tits. The marten inspects access to the box. © *Ron Summers*.

Plate 27. A Jay inspecting the nest box occupied by Blue Tits. © *Ron Summers*.

Great Tits *Parus major* commonly used nest boxes at Culbin in the past, but none used the boxes with the grid, perhaps because the grid was too small to allow them access. Further, the low rate of use by Crested Tits may also have been caused by the small grid dimensions. In future years, we plan to expand the grid slightly to allow access for these larger tits.

As Pine Martens extend their distribution within the British Isles (Croose *et al.* 2013), anyone who erects nest boxes in woods and gardens will have to be aware that martens can predate adult birds and chicks by dragging the birds through the nest entrance (Taylor *et al.* 2016). We suspect that when chicks are close to fledging and become more vocal, they are at their most vulnerable to predation. Therefore, the absence of chicks in a box around fledging time may not be due to successful fledging.

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Ian Langford (1956–2017)

Plate 28. Ian Langford, Galloway, September 1996. *© Joan Howie*

Ian's enthusiasm and passions in life were never going to be fulfilled by one job and, when he and Angela lived in Galloway, he was an area officer with SNH, ran a specialist second-hand bookshop in Wigtown and opened the Tropic House nearby with its carnivorous plants and free-flying butterflies. Ian made sure that the book shop could also accommodate a small gallery and it was here that his lifelong love and knowledge of wildlife art could be shared with visitors.

The seeds for Langford Press Publishing were now sown and came to fruition in 2001 launching the Wildlife Art Series that aimed 'to excite and inspire readers with the best in contemporary wildlife art.' There were important conservation themes close to Ian's heart in many of the titles, for example, old orchards, disappearing hay meadows, the effects of modern agriculture and the hazards of bird migration. Many artists were given the opportunity to be published for the first time and Ian always stressed that it was 'their' book. There was a licence to create, to be artist, author and have a big say in the lay out. Ian saw his role as facilitator, always supportive and positive, but ensuring that the finished product was of the highest quality. The success of this series encouraged him into other areas of publishing, focusing on wildlife art techniques, on biographies (excellent volumes on Bryan Nelson and Derek Ratcliffe for instance), reprinting facsimile copies of 'unobtainable' books by Charles Darwin and even a small set of children's books.

The world of wildlife art has lost a committed champion and loyal supporter. For many years Langford Press sponsored three prizes at the annual Society of Wildlife Artists exhibition in London but his lasting legacy rests on many bookshelves around the country and beyond, a wonderfully varied, beautifully presented suite of books that certainly does 'excite and inspire'. For that alone many of us would say, with sincere gratitude, 'thank you so much Ian'.

John Threlfall

Ian worked for the Nature Conservancy Council Scotland/Scottish Natural Heritage in Galloway from September 1991 to May 2004. During this time, he was an active member of the Stewartry branch and served on their committee for four years. He moved south in 2004 to work for English Nature/Natural England until December 2011. For two years, from 1989 to 1991, he was a Community Education Tutor for Dumfries and Galloway and is fondly remembered by members of his evening classes on ornithology for his unconventional approach to teaching. This included renaming each class member after a bird and thereafter always referring to them by that bird's name!

Ian will be remembered for his kindness and generosity. One day I mentioned that I could not find a white Buddleja bush for my garden.

A few days later, he was on my doorstep with one he had bought for me. On another occasion, he gave me eight of his beautiful Langford Press books for Stewartry branch funds. The late Joan and Donald Watson were delighted when he dug and stocked a pond for them in their Dalry garden.

With so many interests, Ian could be persuasive when he needed help. A keen member of the local Barn Owl Group when he found he was unable to give time to his allotted survey area he persuaded me to carry out his survey of nest sites as well as those of my own area. It was a mammoth task!

Ian never lost his lovely broad accent though could not understand why, when talking on Barn Owls to the Stewartry branch in November 1986, his hostess immediately remarked that he must be from Birmingham! Ian will be remembered for his cheerfulness and friendliness, his great enthusiasm for his many and varied interests, especially for wildlife and wildlife art. Condolences go to his wife Angela and daughter Zoe for their sad loss.

Joan Howie

Jimmy Steele (1962–2017)

On 16 November, we lost Jimmy Steele. Jimmy died quietly at home in Gosforth, Newcastle upon Tyne, surrounded by his family, having had a brain tumour diagnosed almost two years earlier. Although aged only 55, during his life he achieved far more than most.

Plate 29. Jimmy Steele, the Netherlands, January 2014. © *John Nadin*

Jimmy was born and raised in Edinburgh. His love of coasts and nature grew on trips with his father George and, especially, on family holidays to his beloved Crovie in North-east Scotland. His mother Christelle, an art teacher, encouraged Jimmy's interest in birds. He joined Malcom Porteous' Edinburgh Young Ornithologists' Club (YOC) in the mid-1970s. On a 1974 YOC outing he met CM, and other young Edinburgh birdwatchers. During the rest of the decade, they birded Lothian sites and later ventured further to Fife, Borders and beyond. Visiting Fair Isle in 1979 and 1981 consolidated Jimmy's interest in migrant birds including Pallas's Reed Bunting!

Jimmy was educated at Edinburgh's Royal High School then studied dentistry at the University of Dundee, graduating in 1985. While there, Jimmy met Katie Bushby, the love of his life. The two married in 1987 in Liverpool.

While Jimmy was studying at Dundee, he birded the Angus and north-east Fife coasts. JN met him with Malcom Ware in 1983 at Tayport. Jimmy had found a lingering Pomarine Skua there; JN was impressed by his depth of knowledge, boyish enthusiasm and great humour. JN's next 'Jimmy encounter' was seawatching at Fife Ness, September 1984. Jimmy recounted with relish seeing a Great Shearwater with large numbers of Sooties heading north the previous day.

Thereafter, Jimmy had a huge influence on JN's birdwatching pursuits - an impact that persists to this day.

In 1985, Jimmy was one of the founders of the Fife Bird Club. He was a driving force at the outset and the first *'Scope'* newsletter editor. He organised great trips away to look for white-winged gulls and to Islay for vagrant Canada Geese. Jimmy, a fine artist, designed the club logo (still in use). He was generally ahead of the crowd, finding and identifying birds others had not even heard of then including Fife's first and third Siberian Stonechats, Ross's Goose and the first mainland Scottish Kumlien's Gull, at Banff in 1985. He enjoyed showing this to many. Other rare finds then included Water Pipit at Elliot, Arbroath and both King Eider and Surf Scoters in Angus and Fife. Probably his best was the only ever Fife mainland Thrush Nightingale at Denburn Wood, in May 1985.

Jimmy then worked in Glasgow and Perth, until 1989 when he and Katie settled in Newcastle. Jimmy's star was rising. He achieved honours and awards, becoming professor and head of Newcastle University Dental School. In 2012, he was awarded a CBE for his services to dentistry, in part for his 2009 report on dental care across England. The '*Steele Review*' was highly influential in reforming dentistry. A charismatic teacher and highly cherished colleague at the dental school and beyond, he positively influenced the practice of thousands of dental students and thus the health of potentially millions of patients - leaving a lasting, living legacy.

On arrival at Newcastle Jimmy had to find a new birding patch. After a few sorties, he settled on Newbiggin-by-the-Sea after seeing a Little Bunting there. This surprisingly under-watched (in autumn 1989) site, being relatively close to his home, was a perfect fit. Jimmy also appreciated the quirky cultural attributes of this post-industrial area. For example, on quiet days, he enjoyed pointing out common-grazed horses being raced bareback along semi-derelict streets!

Soon, Jimmy was finding rare birds on his patch: Dusky and Hume's Warblers and Olive-backed Pipit fell quickly. He and local birder Alan Priest became great friends. His list of local finds at Newbiggin grew, as did his reputation among Northumberland birders and beyond. Jimmy was most proud of the second British Black-faced Bunting he found there in 1999. Other highlights included Pallas's Grasshopper Warbler, Iberian Chiffchaff, Fea's Petrel and Franklin's Gull.

Jimmy served on the *British Birds* Rarities Committee (BBRC) for nine years, writing several key identification papers and was later on the BOU Records Committee (BOURC) where he helped with several complex issues, including how to assess vagrant Canada Geese, one of his life-long passions.

Jimmy's analytical and communication skills benefited his work for BBRC and BOURC as did his seemingly boundless enthusiasm; putting enormous effort in. Jimmy is known in particular for his identification work on the Druridge Bay Slender-billed Curlew. He wrote the paper describing its acceptance onto the British list and it is a testament to the integrity of the man that he also co-authored the paper explaining the retraction of that record largely on the grounds that the bird was, by 1998, near extinction. This was despite the conviction Jimmy held, to the very end, that the bird was indeed, despite the apparent odds, a Slender-billed Curlew.

Jimmy's Newbiggin obsession was the perfect antidote to a high-powered career; he visited as often as he could. Jimmy loved seawatching at Church Point and would simultaneously study several weather websites to predict seabirds there.

In September 2016, Jimmy's weather map analysis led him to plump for Barra over Ireland or Shetland for one of his final birding trips. As luck would have it, this meant that he was one of the first to see Eastern Kingbird in Britain! Some people, however, shape their own luck, few more so than Jimmy Steele.

As well as birdwatching, Jimmy loved all wildlife. He was very keen on marine animals and recently identified a juvenile Bearded Seal at Newbiggin. He was widely travelled, and always managed to add a day or two onto his

many overseas assignments, for wildlife watching. He and Katie, both self-confessed 'foodies', visited some of the finest restaurants in the world - especially in Spain. Jimmy first visited Andalusia with Michael Gardner (another Edinburgh YOC friend) in 1978 and enjoyed recounting, 39 years later, their adventures in the Coto Donana. He returned several times with Katie, Tom and Jenny, to enjoy the local food and dry sherry!

Another of Jimmy's passions was foraging for wild mushrooms which combined his expert ID skills with his love of food. Jimmy was skilled at selecting and preparing fresh fish into gourmet dishes to share with family and friends. He was given two lobster pots for his 50th birthday and similarly loved catching fresh lobsters and crabs that he would then cook, prepare and share.

Recently, Jimmy spent time birding at Low Newton-by-the-Sea, where he and Katie had a cottage. With local birder, Gary Woodburn, Jimmy found or saw more rarities including a Terek Sandpiper, Lesser Grey Shrike and Collared Flycatcher, plus another Bearded Seal. Alan Priest expressed his concern to JN that Newbiggin would lose Jimmy to his new patch. However, that was never going to happen; in the last months of his life, Jimmy spent as much time as he could at Newbiggin, adding great views of Basking Shark to his Newbiggin list. He was seawatching at Church Point up until a few weeks before he died.

Jimmy invested time and effort trying to set up a permanent reserve at Newbiggin, recently producing an avifauna, complete with photographs and notes. This was the only list Jimmy was ever interested in compiling and these documents will be held on a new website 'Natural Newbiggin'. Jimmy restored the little brick and concrete seawatching hide at Church Point. A fitting plaque was recently placed there by his local birding friends.

He leaves his wife Katie, son Tom, daughter Jenny, sister Alison, mother Christelle and very many friends.

In Jimmy's death, Britain has lost a great birder. His passions and skills were forged in Scotland, a country to which he frequently returned, particularly to search through goose flocks. Scottish birding has lost one of its finest exports.

John Nadin & Chris McGuigan

Plate 30. A tag fitted to a Lesser Black-backed Gull, Greenock, Clyde, May 2017. © *Hayley Anne Douglas*

Tag-n-Track – tracking technology used to change the public perception on the Lesser Black-backed Gull

H.A. DOUGLAS & H. RILEY

Tag-n-Track is a two year project funded by Heritage Lottery Fund, Greater Renfrewshire and Inverclyde LEADER and Clyde Muirshiel Regional Park. The project focuses on using the latest satellite tracking technology to track Lesser Black-backed Gulls. By using Global Satellite Monitoring (GSM) tags (fitted to the gulls with Teflon harnesses) that weigh 21 g (Plate 30), we can get information on the birds' locations between 10–15 times a day for the next two years at least. The gulls migrate to Europe and Africa in the winter from the local area, which we know through colour ringing recoveries by the Clyde Ringing Group. They are very misunderstood birds and people generally don't like them and see them as pests. Part of this project is to engage the public with our findings and try to change perceptions. This is done through talks with groups and schools, social media and weekend information events. The Tag-n-Track Project is run by two gull enthusiasts: Hayley Douglas who is the Development Officer (Plate 31) and Hannah Riley who is the Project Ranger at Clyde Muirshiel Regional Park (Plate 32). Both are members of the Clyde Ringing Group.

How to catch a gull

One of our aims for this project is to determine whether there is a difference in foraging and migration behaviour between gulls that nest in urban areas and gulls that nest in the countryside. For our urban area, Greenock was chosen. There are many nesting gulls in the area and we got permission to access the roof of the Police Station. There we used trap door traps (Plate 33) to catch the birds and successfully caught two and fitted them with the tags. We were unable to catch any more than that because the birds started to recognise us and would not go near the traps.

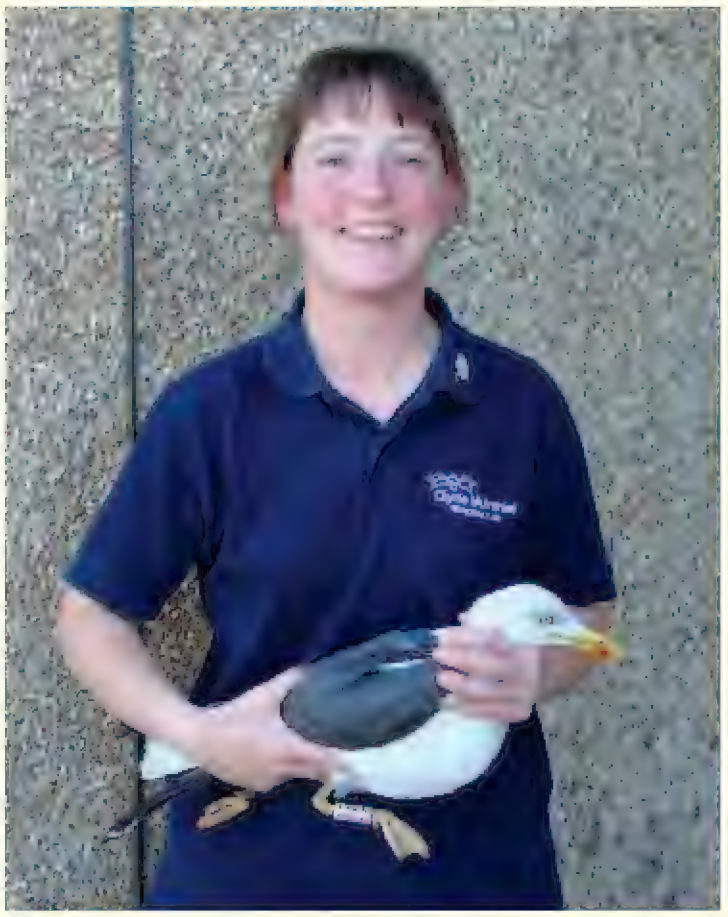

Plate 31. Hayley with Lesser Black-backed Gull *Gully MacGullface*, the last gull to be tagged, Castle Semple Loch, Clyde, July 2017. © *Hannah Riley*

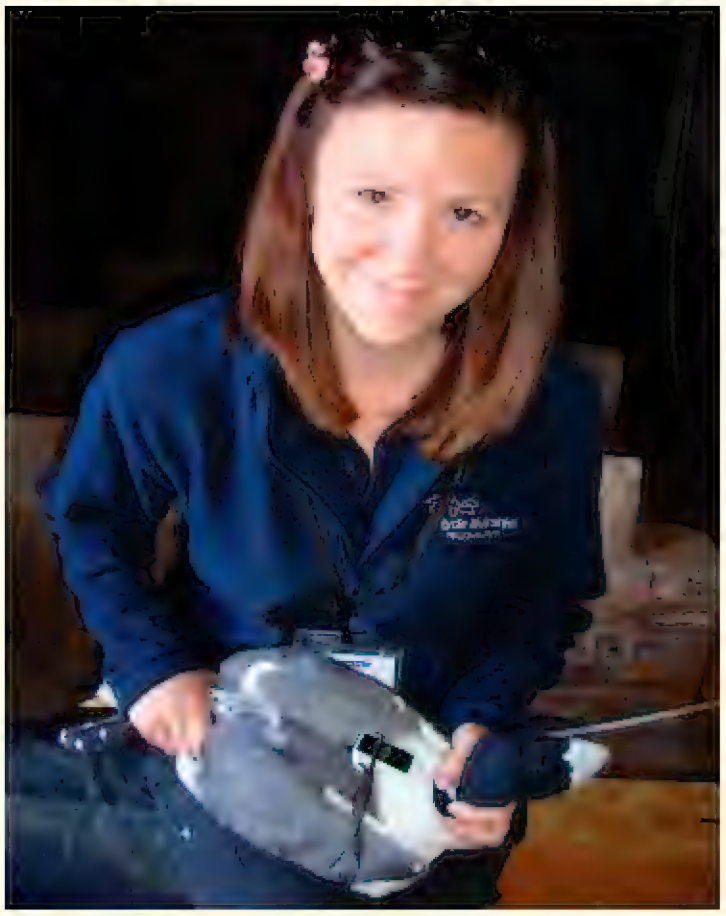

Plate 32. Hannah with Lesser Black-backed Gull *P.C. Bobby* during tag fitting, Greenock, Clyde, May 2017. © *Hayley Anne Douglas*

For the countryside area, an island on Loch Thom at Greenock Cut was chosen. There were Herring Gulls, Common Gulls, Great Black-backed Gulls and Lesser Black-backed gulls nesting on the island as well as Canada Geese and Oystercatcher. There were estimated to be over 400 eggs in total. Unlike the Police Station roof, we had to observe the island and put out markers to ensure the traps were put on the right nests. After a few days we gathered a team together to trap the birds. However, the water level at Loch Thom had been lowered making it possible to walk on to the island and all the eggs had been taken out of the nests, a huge devastation to the colony and to our project too. Unfortunately, nobody knows who took the eggs and it is unlikely that we will find out, however we will be keeping a closer eye on it for next year.

Due to a number of factors, we were unable to access another colony to catch birds at the nest. Therefore, we decided to hand catch birds at Castle Semple in Lochwinnoch, using food to attract them. This was easy at first, however, the birds again recognised us and would no longer come down. Various disguises were needed to catch the rest of them! We caught the remaining birds at Hessilhead Wildlife Rescue where a whoosh net was used successfully with the help of the Clyde Ringing Group (Plate 34). In total it took seven weeks to catch the 12 gulls we needed for the project. Each gull has been named to encourage public engagement with some being named by schools and local businesses. These are *P.C. Bobby*, *Gary*, *Atty*, *Flyback*, *Stephen*, *Roger*, *Roland*, *Stuart*, *Clyde*, *Jonathan LC Gull*, *Archie* and *Gully MacGullface* who collectively make up 'Team Gull'. Team Gull consists of all males, which was not planned but during the tagging process any females we caught were too light to be fitted with the tags. However, they and any chicks were fitted with colour rings instead.

Gull migration

Flyback was our first gull to migrate and he did so in July. He had been hand caught at Lochwinnoch on 9 June. From there he went to Little Cumbrae and then to a building in Linwood where we believe his nest was. He spent time around the area, foraging and roosting before heading off on his migration. On 22 July, he was recorded on the Ayrshire coast before heading south to Whithorn on the 23rd. He travelled from there to the Isle of Man on that same day in just one hour, and was

recorded going through the Menai Strait four hours later. By 05:00 hrs on the 24th he was just off the coast of mainland Wales west of Snowdonia National Park. He continued south over the Bristol Channel, through Devon, over the English Channel and in to Brittany by 15:00 hrs on 24 July. He stayed in France feeding off the Penmarch coast and inland at Quimper until 31 July, when he then travelled into Spain. By 1 August, he was making his way east over the northern coast of Spain and down into Portugal on 5 August. On 7 August, and then again on the 9th, he was photographed on a beach in Portugal called Costa da Caparica by Gilberto Pinelas. He stayed in the region until the 13th when he then flew to Morocco and settled in Casablanca, a total journey time of 25 days from leaving Linwood. For two and a half months he settled in to a routine of visiting a fish factory and a local dump before heading further south down the coast to Safi. We felt 25 days was an impressive time for *Flyback* to make this journey, but a month later it was bettered by one of our other gulls, Clyde, who travelled a similar route in 8 days and 21 hours.

Archie was our last gull to head off on migration. *Archie* was caught using a whoosh net on 7 July at Hessilhead Wildlife Hospital. After his tag was fitted, he regularly returned to his catching site to forage. It is believed that his nest site was on Kilmarnock train station along with another gull, *Jonathan LC Gull*. The joy of the tags is that we can work out where the birds are foraging and

Plate 33. Setting up trap at a nest with Hayley Anne Douglas (left) and Ruedi Nager of the University of Glasgow, Greenock, Clyde, May 2017. © *Hannah Riley*

Plate 34. Clyde Ringing Group helping to catch and tag gulls, Hessilhead, Ayrshire, May 2017. © *Hayley Anne Douglas*

Archie seemed to settle into a routine of going from Kilmarnock train station to the Kilmaurs area via the local Asda (Figure 1). He did this until 1 December when the cold weather finally tempted him to move. He flew straight down to Cornwall and was there till the 9th when he decided to fly to France and is currently (as we write this) hanging out near Royan.

Unfortunately, not all of our gulls have survived this year. *Gully MacGullface* migrated to Spain but we noticed on 13 November that we had stopped getting downloads from his tag. After a bit of investigation, we discovered that *Gully* had died on 3/4 November. We had been told that the tag was going to sleep and would stop working as it was not able to charge but we then got a signal almost two weeks later, probably because the tag had been turned back over and was able to charge again using its solar panel.

After a discussion with members of the Clyde Ringing Group, one of its members, Iain Livingstone, managed to contact some local birders in Spain. José Manuel got in touch and armed with the last known coordinates, he headed out to the marsh where we believed *Gully* to be. He very quickly found *Gully's* coloured ring and then spent an hour going around in circles before he found the remains of *Gully* and his tag. Looking at our data and talking with José, we surmised that *Gully* died not long after arriving at the fish farm, potentially being caught in netting. After a few days he was removed and left nearby where he was then picked up and scavenged by a Marsh Harrier.

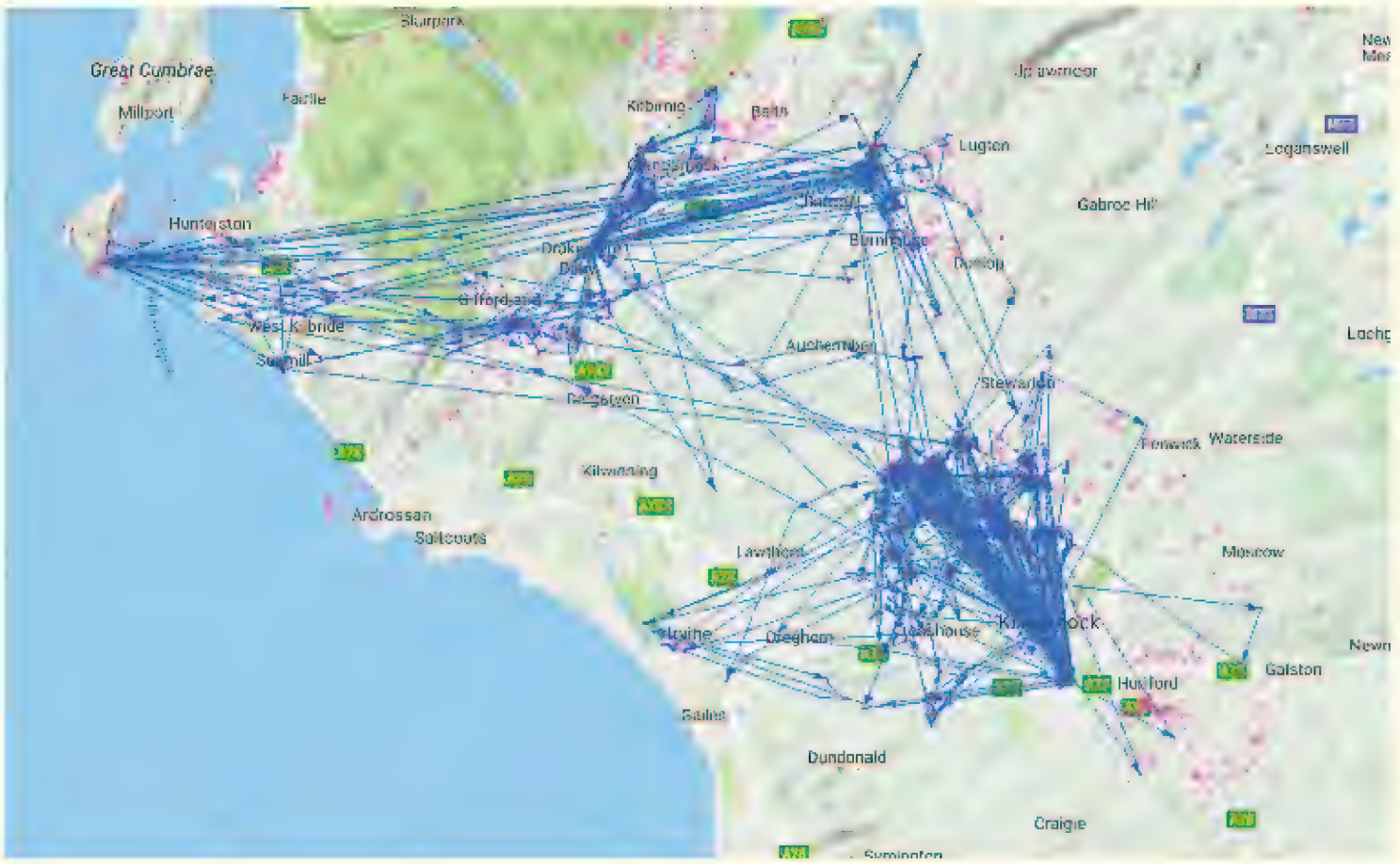

Figure 1. Local foraging pattern for Lesser Black-backed Gull *Archie* in Ayrshire from 7 July until 22 November 2017.

It's sad that this is the end of *Gully MacGullface* after making his migration from Lochwinnoch to Ireland and then to Portugal and Spain, but unfortunately there are many dangers that our gulls face. We are extremely grateful to José who recovered his tag and we were able to track its flight back to the UK! We should be able to redeploy the tag next year. *Gully MacGullface* was a popular gull with all the pupils we worked with and has provided a vast amount of data for us to analyse.

Engaging the public and schools

Our main aim of Tag-n-Track is to better the public perception of Lesser Black-backed Gulls and gulls in general. As we all know, gulls are probably one of our most disliked birds but they are also synonymous with memories of the seaside and admired for their beauty in flight. What we want to show with the tracking element of the project is that the gulls we see hanging about in car parks and school playgrounds don't always frequent these areas and that they migrate to a number of different countries. The team attended a number of local events such as the Gourock Highland Games and Lochwinnoch gala day to promote the project and talk to the public about their views on gulls. We also held a number of bird ringing events and gull themed walks to encourage the public to get involved. These have all proven to be very successful with over 2,000 members of the public in the first year alone getting the opportunity to learn about gulls and other birds. Bird ringing in particular allows the public to really get up close and personal with the birds and we had many repeat visitors over the series of events. The team also deliver talks and workshops to a wide range of groups from natural history societies to SWRI groups and these too have been well attended with nearly 1,000 people participating.

In August, we began the delivery of a busy school programme that ran through until December (Plate 35). Primary 7 and S1 pupils (1,738 pupils in total) across the three council areas of Renfrewshire, Inverclyde and North Ayrshire took part in a series of three workshops. Many topics were covered which included discussions about gulls and the pupils' opinions of them, how we track them, learning how to use mapping tools and the tracking website, as well as learning about how they can use technology to learn about wildlife in their local area. Overall it has been a great success and at the end of the workshops the pupils certainly showed a better understanding of our wildlife

Plate 35. School children examining feathers, Muirshiel Country Park, Clyde, February 2017. © *Natalie McAlindon*

and gulls in particular. We were known as the 'seagull ladies' (and yes we did teach them that seagull isn't the best term to use but we didn't want to curb their enthusiasm) and the teachers commented on how excited the pupils were each week when they knew we were coming in. This even applied to the pupils in the secondary schools, much to our surprise, as they can be hard to work with as they find their way in a new school and with new classmates. We used tablets with the pupils to help them develop an understanding of using scientific keys. These also proved very popular with the teachers who often find this quite a dry subject as they can only give the pupils paper keys to work with. As the wildlife keys are easy to access, the teachers are now looking at using tablets more to engage pupils in wildlife as well as fulfilling their commitments to science and technology in the Curriculum for Excellence. Many schools have chosen to adopt their own gull and teachers are using the mapping website and gull movements to further pupils understanding of science, history, technology and culture. Hannah Riley, one half of Tag-n-Track, says "It's great to see kids engaging not just with TnT but with nature in general. There were always loads of questions and the kids really enjoyed the interactive elements of the project particularly because they could use the tracking website on their own and share it with their families. They would come back in the following week and tell us what the gulls had been up to as well as downloading apps to their phones that they were keen to show us."

The TnT team will be working with schools again in 2018 after the next round of tagging. Social media such as Facebook and the Clyde Muirshiel Tag-n-Track web pages have also played a massive part in getting the project across to the wider public. Updates are regularly posted of the gulls' movements and each gull has its own dedicated webpage. There is also the opportunity to support the project by sponsoring one of the gulls. Each sponsor receives a certificate, factsheet, monthly email updates, their name on their gull's webpage and a fluffy gull to call their own. To find out more, check out the "adopt a gull" part of the TnT webpages at clydemuirshiel.co.uk/event/tag-n-track-gull-adoption or follow us on Facebook at www.facebook.com/TagnTrack.

2018 will see us back out in the field with a plan to tag a further 13 Lesser Black-backed Gulls as well as continuing to follow the fortunes of our remaining members of Team Gull. Fingers crossed for another good field season.

Hayley would like to acknowledge the SOC who provided a research grant that allowed the purchase of the darvic rings which the tagged gulls as well as untagged gulls were fitted with during the project.

Hayley Anne Douglas
Email: tnt@clydemuirshiel.co.uk

Hannah Riley
Email: tntwo@clydemuirshiel.co.uk

NEWS AND NOTICES

SOC Annual Conference & AGM

26–28 October 2018, Macdonald Aviemore Resort, Aviemore. Programme and booking information will be included with the June issue of *Scottish Birds.*

Waterston House

Jean Torrance retires

Jean retired at the end of December after more than 13 years of service to the Club. During this time, she has been involved in managing the library and general office administration before moving on to focus exclusively on the Club's bookkeeping, where her keen eye for detail and excellent analytical skills facilitated a consistently clean bill of health from the auditor as well as providing invaluable support to a succession of Presidents and Honorary Treasurers. Council thanks Jean for her hard work, dedication and general eagerness to turn her hand to almost anything in order to help colleagues and constantly make improvements to procedures and systems.

Plates 36–37. Jean Torrance cutting her leaving cake (made by Vicky McLellan), November 2017. © *Doreen Main*

Staff and volunteers held a leaving presentation for Jean at this year's Waterston House Christmas Party on 13 December followed by an after-work drinks reception on the Friday, kindly hosted by Doreen and James Main.

Fortunately, we are not losing Jean from the team altogether, as she has decided to return as a regular volunteer in the library, lending her experience and knowledge there.

A note from Jean: *I would like to say thank you to everyone who sent me best wishes for my retirement and who contributed to my leaving gift. The Volunteers' Christmas party was a great send off and I had the chance to see lots of friends, both old and new. I was most touched to receive a wonderful bouquet of flowers, an AA walkers' guide book and a king's ransom in gift vouchers for Tiso's outdoors store.*

It has been a pleasure working at SOC and I value the friendship and support from colleagues and management and volunteers throughout my tenure. I wish my successor, Mairead, well.

Plate 38. Dave Allan (centre) with a group on a guided walk at Gosford Bay, Lothian, August 2012. © *Sylvia Milne*

Farewell to Dave Allan

Dave retires at the end of March 2018. As well as organising year after year of first class wildlife art exhibitions, Dave was also the face of Waterston House at weekends, welcoming regular and first-time visitors with his well-known hospitality and his expert knowledge of birds and optics. Indeed, many local members and non-members will know Dave from having participated on HQ's popular guided walks for beginners, which Dave organised and led himself. Council thanks Dave for his 13 years of dedicated service and particularly for his vital role in making the gallery the success that it is. He will be sorely missed by staff, volunteers and visitors alike but we all wish him a much deserved very happy retirement, which will no doubt involve even more birdwatching!

Mairead Lyons - SOC Finance Officer

The position of Bookkeeper/Finance Officer was advertised in September and attracted a higher than expected number of very strong applications. The Finance Committee was delighted when its candidate of choice, Mairead Lyons, accepted the job offer. Mairead, who took up post in November for a hand-over period with Jean, lives locally and has a solid background in bookkeeping as well as a proven track record in finance management, having worked with Scotland's largest print distribution and display specialists, EAE Ltd. Council warmly welcomes Mairead on board and looks forward to her involvement in helping to manage and steer the Club's finances.

Plate 39. Mairead Lyons, the new Finance Officer at Waterston House, November 2017. © *Steve Cox*

Art exhibitions

Society of Wildlife Artists (SWLA): showing until 4 April
John Threlfall: 7 April to 23 May
John Cox and Colin Woolf: 26 May to 11 July

Optics Demo Day

Sunday 13 May, 10 am–4 pm, free event
A wide range of binoculars and telescopes to try out in field conditions. Or pop in for some free, friendly expert advice. If there are any models that you are particularly interested in looking at, please let us know and we will do our best to have these available for you to try at the event.

Up-to-date details of all upcoming events at Waterston House are available at www.the-soc.org.uk

New publication

Nature of Manor: *Natural history of a valley in South-east Scotland* is a new title by SOC Borders' branch member, Graham Pyatt, published in January and supported by *The Birds of Scotland* Fund. It represents the result of 15 years of survey in the 75 km² Manor Water catchment near Peebles. The survey concentrates on birds but includes geology, soils, water, habitats, wildflowers and animals. After a review of current land use, the author concludes that this is too narrow and unsustainable according to Scottish Government policy. He argues that radical changes of land use are required to better serve the public good and presents a blueprint for the future.

The 432-page publication is in A4 softback format and is priced at £20.00. Copies are available for sale at Waterston House. For mail order enquiries, email pyattnom@gmail.com (p&p charges will apply).

Scottish Ringers' presentation

The Scottish Ringers' Conference was hosted by the Tay Ringing Group at the Carrbridge Hotel in 2017. One of our late members, Henry Robb, was a regular attendee at the conferences over the years and on his death left a bequest to the Tay Ringing Group.

Plate 40. Derek Robertson, Chair Tay Ringing Group (left) with Professor Will Cresswell, Carrbridge, Highland, 11 November 2017. © *Jeroen Minderman*

This year, the first talk was named the 'Henry Robb Lecture'. It was given by Professor Will Cresswell focusing on his research on migrants travelling between Africa and Europe (a subject that would have been of great interest to Henry through his own studies of Pied Flycatchers and Redstarts at Loch Katrine). At the end of the talk, Will was presented with a cheque for £100 from Henry Robb's bequest to be used to help support an African researcher working in the field on the project. Will explained that the money would make a real difference in assisting the training of indigenous ornithologists in Africa.

Derek Robertson

Plate 41. Detail of Kittiwakes from Borders Bird Report cover artwork *by Maggie Brewis*

Borders Bird Report 2016

At 214 pages, this is a bigger than usual report with colour photography. Many of the species accounts include comments on trends in recent years which are supported by graphs. The accounts include a first for Borders in the form of a Paddyfield Warbler and other rarities such as Siberian Stonechat, Woodchat Shrike, Dusky Warbler and Ortolan Bunting, the last two of which are accompanied by descriptions of the actual finds. There is also a brief account of recent trends in the Dipper population of Manor Valley and the usual summary of ringing in the Region for 2016, as well as raptor reports and the annual report from St Abb's Head Reserve. Copies are available at £7 plus £1.50 P&P from: Malcolm Ross, 24 Netherbank, Galashiels TD1 3DH. Alternatively, you can save yourself £1.50 by buying a copy at SOC HQ.

Plate 42. Branch members on the beach near Cairnbulg, including Branch Treasurer Paddy Grant, Secretary John Wills and Chair Jenny Weston (second, fifth and seventh from left), 19 November 2017. © *Nick Picozzi*

North-East Scotland Branch celebrates 70th anniversary

When the new Aberdeen Branch met for the first time on 19 November 1947, the 'Two Good Ladies' Evelyn Baxter and Leonora Rintoul addressed the gathering under the local chairmanship of Professor Vero Wynne-Edwards. Other distinguished guests including P.H.T. Hartley, Kenneth Williamson and Bernard Tucker, propelled the branch through that first winter session.

It was decided that the branch would celebrate the 70th anniversary of this event on 19 November 2017 with a group outing to the coast, followed by lunch at a local hostelry. Ten branch members and partners braved the elements for the walk from Cairnbulg harbour along the edge of the dunes to the Water of Philorth and returned as far as Cairnbulg village. The weather was bracing to say the least with a strong, cold, north-westerly wind blowing and a heavy sea running, ideal for hardy kite surfers but necessitating wrapping up warm onshore. There were plenty of gulls in the surf zone and waders working the washed-up seaweed along the strand line. The best bird of the morning was a second-winter Glaucous Gull that had been Darvic-ringed in Fraserburgh by Phil Bloor and Morten Helberg of the Grampian Ringing Group in March 2017 and may have spent the summer on the Aberdeenshire coast as it was seen again in April, August and September.

Plate 43. Alan Knox speaking after the lunch, 19 November 2017. © *Paddy Grant*

At midday, we took the short drive to the adjacent village of St Combs and the Tufted Duck Hotel where more members and spouses joined us for a splendid carvery lunch in the glass-walled Strathbeg Room overlooking the sea. After an excellent lunch, committee member Alan Knox briefly reviewed the history of the Branch and raised a toast to the Club and absent friends.

John Wills

Plate 44. The *Living with Birds* team (left to right): Guy Kirwan, Mike Dawson, Nick Baker and Duncan MacDonald, November 2017. © *Reg Land*

Inky fingers to Eilat

On 26 March 2018, Mike Dawson, from our printers Swallowtail, will be raising money for BirdLife International by taking part in the 'Champions of the Flyway' bird race as part of team *Living with Birds*. Starting and finishing in Eilat, Mike, along with Duncan MacDonald, Guy Kirwan and Nick Baker will have 24 hours to see as many species as possible and this year's money will be donated to BIOM and BPSSS, BirdLife partners in Croatia and Serbia, who will use the funds in an attempt to halt the killing of birds using the Adriatic flyway. Previous races, organised by Israeli Ornithological Centre and SPNI have helped projects in Georgia, Turkey, Greece and Cyprus, and have attracted teams from the UK, USA, Finland and South Africa. Team *Living with Birds* is supported by bird-care company Jacobi Jayne and Viking Optical, but if you would like to support their efforts, and with a team target of £3,700 every pound helps. Please follow the *Living with Birds* team link on **www.champions-of-the-flyway.com/living-with-birds** where you can donate via their Just Giving page.

Further SOC interest is provided by Darren Woodhead, fresh from a successful exhibition at Waterston House, who will be competing as one of the Zeiss Yorkshire Terriers, along with Mark Pearson, Jono Leadley and Richard Baines.

Branch updates

Borders Indoor Meetings: change of venue; Kingsknowe Hotel, Galashiels.

Any changes to venue details are circulated by email as well as posted on the SOC website and announced at meetings. For any members without internet access and not a regular meeting goer, please call Neil Stratton on 01573 450695 before attending future meetings, although no further changes of venue are planned for the remainder of the current season.

Rob Fray, Shetland recorder: change of address; The Meadows, Bakkasetter, Quendale, Shetland ZE2 9JD. Tel: 07775 647463

Correction: The email address for Graham Sparshott, the new Fife recorder, should be: grahamspa@aol.com

ARTIST PROFILES

Colin Woolf

As a child, Colin Woolf remembers that his impulse to draw was so strong that his parents could not keep up with the demand for paper! He grew up in the New Forest and now lives in Scotland, where he is surrounded by the magnificent landscapes and wildlife that inspire his work.

Colin has always been particularly inspired by the wilder parts of Britain - the mountains and moorlands, the remote rocky coastlines and turbulent seas. His subjects range from Mountain Hares to Golden Eagles, and from Black Grouse to Barn Owls; very often, a quick sighting will inspire a painting that captures the exact mood and lighting, with a scene full of life and movement.

For many years, Colin has worked in watercolour but now he is increasingly turning towards oils, which allow new freedom to experiment with colour and texture. He also works in pencil, creating subtle and lifelike drawings of wildlife.

Colin's works are admired for their depth, drama and acutely observed detail. In the words of one of his clients, "His insight into nature is amazing." He has also learned and refined the traditional art of painting with a Woodcock's pin-feather, and these small, beautiful paintings are highly sought after.

Plate 46. Detail from 'Goldfinches in flight' *by Colin Woolf*

Plate 45. Detail from 'Heaven & Earth Golden Eagle' *by Colin Woolf*

John Cox

There just aren't enough hours in the day.

In recent years finely detailed book illustration took up most of my artistic week. This didn't leave as much time as I wanted to create looser, more impressionistic work for exhibition. The demands of producing the feather perfect portraits that are required for field guides and handbooks increasingly made me want to try and capture in paint the essence of actually watching animals in the wild and how they are affected by the weather and their environment.

My home is surrounded by the fields of a dairy farm and so my work is increasingly of rural/pastoral subjects and it is the quality of light and the often unexpected associations between animals, especially those between farm and wild animals that inspire my paintings.

When working on illustrations for books, I paint with Gouache which I find ideal, as it can produce fine detail and can be re-worked even after it has dried. For exhibition painting, however, I enjoy using a wide range of mediums from watercolour to pastels. Larger works are mostly produced in oils, but recently I have turned to using acrylics; mostly for speed as they dry so quickly. When sketching from life, I use the traditional pencil and watercolour technique.

I have produced many illustrations for field guides to birds and animals from around the world (notably the ground-breaking *Handbook of Birds of the World*). Although it is impossible to see every species I am asked to paint 'in the field', I believe that a good knowledge of as many species as possible in their natural habitat is essential to be able to create a lifelike image on the page. As with all artists, working from life and fieldwork is vital and my sketchbooks have accompanied me to many parts of the world from North America to Borneo.

I became a full time wildlife artist and illustrator in 1989 after winning *British Birds* magazine's prestigious 'Bird Illustrator of the Year' award. As well as painting for exhibition, I have produced illustrations for a number of books, including *Handbook of Birds of the World*, *Pigeons and Doves of the World*, *A Field Guide to the Birds of Armenia*, *Birds of the Indian Subcontinent*, *Pheasants, Partridges and Grouse of the World* and *Petrels and their allies*.

Born 1967 in Romford, Essex, I was elected a member of the Society of Wildlife Artists in 1993. I now live in Preston, Lancashire with my wife, daughter and twin sons.

John Cox and Colin Woolf are exhibiting at Waterston House between Saturday 26 May and Wednesday 11 July.

Plate 47. Detail from 'Eiders at Lindisfarne' (acrylic) *by John Cox*

Plates 48–49. Spotted Flycatcher using an old Swallow's nest, Borders, June 2017. © *Borders SOC member*

Other nests re-use

Following on from Jimmy Maxwell's article about birds using old nests, and the request for photos of further examples, I attach some photos of the Spotted Flycatchers using an old Swallow's nest under the patio roof of my house (Plate 48). The 'foundation' of the nest is an old speaker. A family has been successfully reared for the last three years and the year before that, a family of Swallows was also successful. Plate 49 is the view from inside the house - I can spend hours sitting watching in comfort without disturbing the birds.

Plate 50. Young Swallows in Blackbird's old nest, Biggar, Borders, September 2015. © *John R. Hart*

This is clearly a prime nesting site as we had the enjoyment this year of watching both the flycatcher and a Wren battling to build in the same old nest. The Wren would carefully position some moss and then fly away. The flycatcher would then come, throw out the moss and put his nesting material in. As soon as he'd gone, the Wren would come back, remove the flycatcher's efforts, put his new bit of moss in, sometimes picking up the discarded piece from the previous trip, and so it went on. The Wren lost the battle in the end as he was probably trying to build several nests at the same time and couldn't keep up. The momentary pause as the incoming bird viewed the efforts of the other one cried out for an anthropomorphic caption, but I didn't get a decent enough photo!

Borders SOC member

A late second brood of Swallows was reared in a previous year's Blackbird's nest in Elsrickle, by Biggar in Borders (Plate 50). The photograph was taken in our garage on 14 September 2015.

John R. Hart

Plates 51–52. House Martin nests on de Havilland Comet airliner, **(left)** the air conditioning outlet and **(right)** on the ventilating air intake, East Fortune, Lothian, 24 August 2017. © *David Bates*

Homes for House Martins – on an aircraft or at sea

D.J. & A.S. BATES, L.J. & T.F. ROGERS

As we disembarked from the de Havilland Comet airliner parked out-of-doors at the National Museum of Flight, East Fortune, East Lothian on 24 August 2017 (Plate 53), a few House Martins greeted us with excited calls. We found two nests inside inlets on the port wing (Plates 51–52). Instead of the usual half cup, there was a low mud wall across each entrance, one with a vertical central metal strip. Otherwise, the sites were reminiscent of the horizontal drainage pipes sometimes used by Sand Martins, too dark to see inside. The birds' behaviour and droppings on the mud of one entrance suggested nestlings. A staff member told us they had nested on aircraft there before.

Neither *BWP*, *The Handbook* nor Ferguson-Lees *et al.* (2011) list such sites, only cliffs and the more familiar buildings. Turner & Rose (1989) add that "Nests are also occasionally built on other artificial structures, including street lamps and ships" but give no details.

Plate 53. The de Havilland Comet airliner, East Fortune, Lothian, 24 August 2017. © *David Bates*

Acknowledgments

Thanks to Helen and Mark Cavanagh who doggedly coaxed thrawn telecommunications gear to send photographs from my phone to NMS and SOC.

References

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D.J. & A.S. Bates, L.J. & T.F. Rogers

David's report of this unusual House Martin nesting site reminds me of an occasion in 2000 when I was crossing Loch Linnhe on the Corran Ferry from Ardgour in Lochaber, Highland. The nest was under the port stairway bulwark, apparently anchored to the electric cabling there (Plate 54). The fact that the ferry was regularly plying the short crossing every 20 minutes did not seem to affect the attentions of the parent birds which continued to visit the nest.

There are further examples of House Martins on ferries including these three notes which featured in British Birds:

One nest on the ferry between Copenhagen, Denmark, and Malmo, Sweden in 1979 (Cox 1983). The ship made the 25-km crossing about eight times each day, and the total passage took about one hour and 40 minutes.

Several pairs nested on a large car ferry in Denmark from 1973 to at least 1983 (Collinge 1985). The 14-km journey was a round trip of two hours. This particular ferry remained in dock until it was used during the peak season by which time the nests usually contained young.

Three pairs nested on a cross-channel ferry based at Newhaven, East Sussex, in 1973 (Hughes 1985). The adults did not make the trip of 120 km to Dieppe, but awaited its return nine hours later. At least one of the nests was known to have been successful.

In view of the ongoing BTO survey of breeding House Martins I contacted the BTO to see it they had received any similar records from Scotland. Unfortunately, they hadn't, but the following two stories were received by the BTO Ringing Unit and are interesting reading:

In Estonia, all the ferries to the larger islands have nesting House Martins. The biggest distance is 22.5 km where the crossing takes about 1 hour 45 minutes. The birds are on or near the ship at all times (Trinus Haitjema in litt.*).*

The ferry that crosses Hardangerfjord (western Norway) had at least five House Martin nests under its eaves. The martins either stayed in the nest on the 20-minute crossing or stayed near land until the ferry returned (Eddie Chapman in litt.*).*

Plate 54. General view of the Corran ferry deck with (inset) the House Martin nest under the stairway, June 2000. © *Jimmy Maxwell*

From this scattering of records, it appears that House Martins have quite a history of nesting on ferries, as well as jet airliners. As for them breeding in other ferries in Scotland, we may possibly get reports from Caledonian MacBrayne and other operators. Perhaps some SOC readers have experience of this - if so please let us know about it.

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Jimmy Maxwell

Plate 55. Short-eared Owl, December 2015. © *Harry Scott*

An exceptionally large Short-eared Owl winter roost in Fife

K.D. SHAW

In *The Birds of Fife* (1986) Anne-Marie Smout described the Short-eared Owl as a winter visitor that sometimes breeds. However, she also mentioned that breeding had not been proven in Fife since the 1968–72 Atlas. Baxter & Rintoul (1953) noted that in some autumns numbers arrive from overseas and in late autumn they had often flushed Short-eared Owls when riding through the old 'cadgers' roads of East Fife. However, Smout (1986) also states that there is no real evidence that the wintering numbers of this owl have changed substantially.

Fife Bird Reports (1996–2010) show that over those 15 years numbers have varied. For example, 1998 was apparently a good breeding year; pairs probably bred in the Cleish and Lomond Hills. In that autumn, birds were seen at eight sites and in the early winter around 20 sites were occupied with a roost of five at Coble House Point on the Eden Estuary. By contrast, 2010 was an extraordinarily poor year with just two spring records, no autumn and winter records. A considerable influx of Short-eared Owls to Fife was noted in the winter of 2011/12 (Elkins *et al.* 2016). During that winter, my colleagues and I completed monthly surveys of wintering birds on an area of unenclosed moorland in the Cleish Hills. This work included regular vantage point counts and walkover surveys. The team were on site at all times of day, particularly dawn and dusk, on average fortnightly. The Cleish Hills had occasionally held very low numbers of Short-eared Owls in winter, but were better known as an occasional wintering area for very small numbers of Hen Harriers.

On 1 November 2011, I noted my first Short-eared Owl on the site. By early December there were three and the team (myself, Kathy Evans and John Nadin) intensified our work, with more dawn and dusk watches. We identified a roosting area that was c.50 x 50 m in size, at an elevation of approximately 230 m and extensively grazed by sheep. The vegetation was dominated by clumps of Soft Rush *Juncus effusus*, 50–70 cm in height; there were also smaller, open areas of shorter grasses e.g. *Molinia caerulea*. On 10 December 2011, in the middle of the day, the farmer Alistair Shaw drove across the area on his quadbike and counted 36 Short-eared Owls. On 19 December, Kathy Evans flushed 15 Short-eared Owls from an adjacent area of 30 x 30 m with very similar vegetation. On 28 January 2012, there were only eight birds in the roost areas and four were still present on 23 March 2012. The owls did not roost in one tight group but rather in clusters of 3–8 individuals usually in or around the thickest areas of rush. They flushed from the observer at c.15–20 m and flew off so counting was straightforward though individuals around the fringes of the area may not have flushed. The owls always flew off to the south or south-west probably because there was a forest to the north and north-east. Our peak count of Short-eared Owls away from the roost was only six, leading us to believe that the birds were hunting far and wide away from the roost. We and others noted that there were many more Short-eared Owls than usual in the surrounding area in 2011/12. Elkins *et al.* (2016) estimated there might have been as many as 70–100 Short-eared Owls in Fife during that winter. We also observed comparatively high numbers of Short-tailed Field Voles at the site, four different Hen Harriers and at least three different Long-eared Owls.

Acknowledgement

I thank the Shaw family, who farm the area, with whom we had very good relations.

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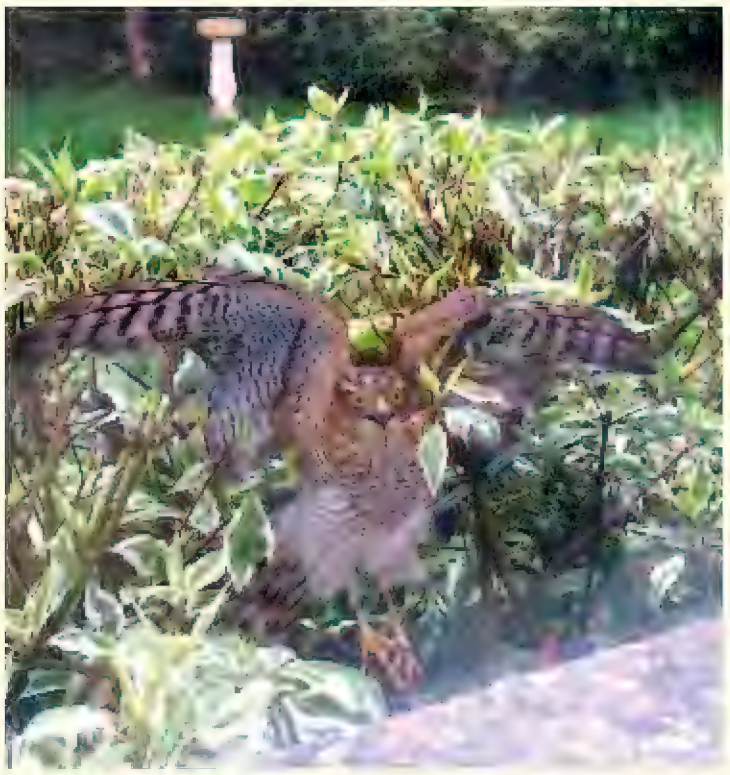


Plate 56. The recovering Sparrowhawk, Gifford, Lothian, July 2017. © *Jeanie Cole*

Predator perplexed

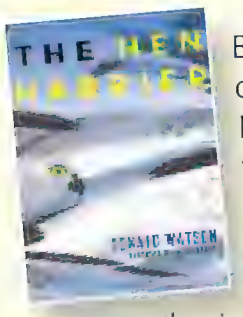
J. COLE

On 23 July 2017, this Sparrowhawk flew into our kitchen window that is near to a bird feeder. I was standing at the window when it happened and reached for my phone to capture the picture (Plate 56). It lay still just looking at me for about three minutes through the glass. Then, while I contemplated donning a pair of thick gloves to free it from the branches of the shrub, it flapped its wings, freed itself and flew off.

Jeanie Cole, Gifford

BOOK REVIEWS

The Hen Harrier. Donald Watson, 2017. Bloomsbury, London, ISBN 978-1-4729-4614-0, hardback, 418 pages, £18.99.



Bloomsbury's edition of *The Hen Harrier* by Donald Watson, 40 years after the original publication, has a foreword by Mark Avery highlighting the importance of this text in the past and its continued relevance today. Watson's narrative and illustrations provide a comprehensive account of this fascinating bird based on a lifetime of observation in the field. It is a lamentable fact that Watson's focus on the illegal persecution of the Hen Harrier is still a prevalent conservation concern today. As recently as the last issue of *Scottish Birds* two articles refer to the negative impact of intensive grouse moor management on birds such as the Hen Harrier. As we approach the 100th anniversary of Donald Watson's birth next year, this new edition is a timely reminder of his contribution to the field of ornithology.

Susan Horne
(SOC Librarian)

Flight Lines: tracking the wonders of bird migration. Mike Toms, 2017. British Trust for Ornithology, Thetford, ISBN 978-1-908581-77-8, hardback, 223 pages, £25.00.

This interesting book is the result of the BTO's four-year joint initiative with the Society of Wildlife Artists (SWLA). It is aimed at highlighting the challenges that Afro-Palearctic migrant birds face and bringing to a wider audience the research and conservation work that is being done to help them. The narrative is by Mike Toms, BTO's Associate Director Communications (Science), and related illustrative material is by 18 members of SWLA, a photojournalist and other photographers. This partnership is a novel way of documenting our summer migrants and those who study them. The rationale is that while science can provide the evidence, making the case for conservation action and monitoring progress towards its goals, the creative arts can deliver passion and engagement.

The book consists of eight chapters: Autumn departures; The journey south; Breaking the journey; The wintering grounds; The return north; Arrivals; Breeding grounds; and The future. Much of the latest scientific information on bird migration comes from the new generation of tracking devices. Some of that provided in this book is excellent, particularly those bits concerning Cuckoos that are based mainly on work by BTO's Chris Hewson and colleagues. SOC members who were at the 2017 Annual Conference will have heard Chris describing his work on Cuckoos, Swifts and Nightingales and a summary of his talk is on p.326 in *Scottish Birds* 37(4). In the first chapter, there is also fascinating information about interspecific variation in pre-migratory fattening strategies amongst warblers. Clearly, there is still an awful lot to learn about bird migration and bits of this book raise more questions than answers. For example, how do young birds migrating for the first time make decisions, what percentage of them die because of the wrong strategy, and how do they compare with older experienced birds?

Much of the artwork is also excellent but it could have been better introduced and better integrated with the text. In addition, some species that are well covered in the text are not represented in the artwork. My main criticism, however, concerns the total absence of any maps to show migration routes and wintering areas, surely an incomprehensible omission in a book that is all about migration (and with *Flight Lines* as its title). Despite such reservations, I recommend this book to you for the wealth of new and important information it contains.

John Savory

A Bird Guide to the Fields of Experience: the private diaries of a passionate birdwatcher. Volume 1: Scotland 1985–86, Norfolk 1986–93. Frank Jarvis, 2017. Chatterpie, Swanton Morley, Norfolk. ISBN 978-0-9957976-0-4, hardback, 152 pages. £24.00.

As a collector of both books and bird art, I was immediately attracted to this book from the very moment I first picked it up. The study painting of a Cuckoo and others inside the book reminded me very much of the work of that great artist Charles Tunnicliffe, the same spread of wings and tail and the fine detail of the plucked feather. The book is set out as an illustrated diary with delightful pencil field sketches and finished

coloured artwork, all captured by careful observation. Only the early pages describe and illustrate visits to Scotland, from the island of Coll in the west to Aberdeenshire in the east. Most of Frank's entries are for Norfolk, where he set up a studio in Kettlestone, before his untimely death in 2002.

This small volume, beautifully produced, is worthy of a place on the bookshelf of those who enjoy both bird art and, particularly, Norfolk birding.

David Clugston

Shorebirds in Action: an introduction to waders and their behaviour. Richard Chandler, 2017. Whittles Publishing, Caithness, ISBN 978-184995-355-9, paperback, 256 pages, £21.95.

Shorebirds in Action is an illustrated survey of the diversity of global shorebirds and their behaviour, by a wader enthusiast and photographer. It is a glossy, large format paperback which is about two-thirds photos. The text is lively and well-informed and serves as a reasonable introduction to why shorebirds look and behave in the way they do. But it is predominantly a flick through and gaze book. The photos are excellent and although many are portrait shots they have been chosen carefully to illustrate points about behaviour and plumage.

The nearest equivalent to this book is the excellent Jan van der Kam *et al.*'s *Shorebirds: an illustrated behavioural ecology**, and comparing the two shows how Richard Chandler's approach is much more about behaviour whereas Jan van der Kam's is more about ecology, with the birds usually a functional part of the larger landscape (and indeed the photos). Bird photography needs to move beyond portrait shots in this way and Richard Chandler also does this very well, with almost all photos having interest beyond the "what is it?" question. That said, about 80% of the word's shorebirds are featured and although this is not intended as a photographic identification guide, there is a lot of pleasure to be had by trying to identify the species correctly as you leaf through the book.

This would be a nice book as a present for any serious birder; it is much more than a coffee table bird book, but still one that even a non-birder might be lured into because of its many interesting and visually attractive photos. And who knows, that non-birder might then get hooked on one of the best orders of birds.

* van de Kam, J., Ens, B., Piersma, T. & Zwarts, L. 2004. *Shorebirds: an illustrated behavioural ecology*. KNNV Uitgeverij.

Will Cresswell

The Barn Owl: guardian of the countryside. Jeff R. Martin, 2017. Whittet Books, Stowmarket, ISBN 978-1-873580-89-9, hardback, 256 pages, £30.00.

This is a well-produced book with excellent illustrations but, with so many books already published on this subject, will it tell me anything new? Yes.

Jeff deals first with the early history of this bird and its subsequent worldwide spread. He also includes some interesting, speculative ideas on its possible evolution. This is followed by a comprehensive description of all aspects of the Barn Owl, carefully researched and drawn from a range of sources.

The main part of the book covers the life cycle of the Barn Owl portrayed in a way that also highlights their situation in the rapidly changing face of the British countryside. While this includes many references to published data, it also contains new and interesting information based on his own personal research into the life of this bird, presented in a clear, concise way.

In the concluding section, the author expresses his own personal opinion regarding the future of the Barn Owl in Britain today and what we should be doing to ensure that future generations will be able to enjoy seeing it in its natural environment rather than just from illustrations in books. Some of his ideas may not meet with universal approval but they are thought provoking and will make readers question how they envisage our countryside and its wildlife to be in the future.

This is a book which gathers together a considerable amount of information in an easily readable style that should have universal appeal. I personally found it enjoyable, interesting, informative and thought provoking. It would also be an excellent book for anyone less experienced and starting out on a study of these iconic birds of our countryside.

Geoff Sheppard

RINGERS' ROUNDUP

If you have any interesting ringing recoveries, articles, project updates or requests for information which you would like to be included in the next issue, please email to Raymond Duncan at: **rduncan393@outlook.com** *Thank you very much to the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) and the many ringers, ringing groups and birders who provided the information for this latest round up. Thanks also to the many bird watchers who take the time and trouble to read rings in the field or find dead ringed birds and report them. For lots more exciting facts, figures, numbers and movements log on to www.bto.org/volunteer-surveys/ringing/publications/online-ringing-reports.*

This edition of the Ringers Round Up comes from the north and west seaboard including the North-west Highlands, the Outer Hebrides and the Inner Hebrides. It summarises selected ringing projects, recoveries and observations of colour-ringed birds from these areas over the spring to winter periods of 2017.

Spring/summer 2017

Pale-bellied Brent Geese: The west coast of Scotland sees a regular passage of Pale-bellied Brent Geese in spring as they head north from their Irish wintering grounds to return to breeding sites in Arctic Canada. Numbers seen can vary greatly depending on weather conditions but west coast ring-readers live in anticipation of dreich misty mornings in April–May, which can see flocks of hundreds of birds dropping in to the bays, where they may stay to feed for a few days. Birds also pass through again in autumn, although they tend to stop off less regularly and in smaller numbers than in the spring, whilst a handful now winter in a few favoured locations on Islay, Barra and Uist. Unlike Sanderling (see below), which often re-appear on the same beach on more of less the same date each year, individually-ringed Brent are very rarely seen more than once at west coast passage sites and are thus prized rings to read. Steve Duffield recorded the Icelandic-ringed colour-ringed Brent **I, H** (yellow rings) at Aird an Runair, North Uist on 21 April 2006, a typical passage date. However, it was to be another 11 years before Steve recorded another colour-ringed Brent. On 24 December 2017, he recorded colour-ringed Brent **N, Z** (yellow and blue rings) nearby at Rubh' Arnal, which had been newly ringed in Iceland in spring 2017 and was its first re-sighting after ringing. Other typical spring recoveries came from Tiree including seven colour-ringed birds read by Francis Daunt at Balephetrish Bay on 2 April, three more at Gott Bay by Rob Archer on 13 April and five more at Sorobaidh Bay on 20 April. Of 13 birds identified, eight had been ringed in the Dublin area, two at Dundrum, County Down and two on Axel Heiburg Island in Arctic Canada. Just as typically, far fewer rings were read in the autumn. Bird **2, N** (white and red rings) was found by Jim Dickson at Salum Bay, Tiree on 1 October 2017 and had been ringed at Álftanes, Skerjafjörður, Iceland on 18 May 2014. On Barra, Bruce Taylor found two ringed birds in a newly arrived flock of 96 birds at Traigh Mhor on 29 September 2017. These were **H** (white ring) a Strangford Loch wintering bird that has lost one of its rings, so its ringing details are unknown, and **N, 9** (blue and yellow rings), which was ringed at Álftanes, Skerjafjörður, Iceland on 11 May 2017 and had not previously been recorded in the field. Many thanks to Graham McElwaine for all the life history details of these birds. Please send sightings of colour-ringed Pale-bellied Brent to Graham at grahammcelwaine@btinternet.com.

Plate 57. Pale-bellied Brent Geese at Sorobaidh Bay, Tiree on 20 April 2017 including 9, V (red rings) ringed at the Royal Dublin golf course, Ireland on 19 November 2013. © *John Bowler*

Sanderling: The west coast also sees heavy spring passage of Sanderling as they head north to their breeding grounds in Greenland. Largest numbers occur in May with flocks of up to 2,200 birds regularly occurring on the Uists and on Tiree with smaller numbers elsewhere in the region, but passage continues well into June. Thanks to Jeroen Reneerkens from the University of Groningen and his colleagues, hundreds of Sanderling now carry unique combinations of colour rings and leg flags, which provide rich pickings for west coast ring readers. Ian Thompson recorded an Icelandic-ringed Sanderling at Askernish beach, South Uist on 17 May 2016, which had been ringed on spring passage in south-west Iceland in May 2016 and had wintered in Brittany, France. The Highland Ringing Group recorded five colour-ringed birds at Ardivachar, South Uist on 11 May 2017 including three that had been ringed on spring passage in SW Iceland, one that had been ringed at Hayling Island, Hampshire on 18 September 2013 and one that had been ringed in the Karupelv Valley, Traill Island in north-east Greenland on 15 July 2016. A leg-flagged bird found by Ian Thompson at Askernish, South Uist on 29 July 2017 had been ringed in Ghana on 27 October 2014 and was already on its return migration. Plate 58 shows three leg-flagged birds photographed on Tiree on 6 April 2017 by Richard Whitson. The two green-flagged birds were both ringed on the Reykjanes peninsula of south-west Iceland in May 2016 and both spent the 2016/17 winter on Tiree before departing in May and June respectively (they are both back wintering on Tiree as I write), whereas the yellow-flagged bird was the first-ever Dutch ringed bird to be recorded on the island. It was ringed in August 2016 at Griend on the Waddenzee in the Netherlands where it was last seen in September 2016 but then appeared on passage in April 2017 on Tiree where it remained until 3 May. A total of 43 different colour-ringed Sanderling was recorded on Tiree in April–June 2017 including two that had been ringed in Greenland, 23 in Iceland, one in Orkney, six in Hampshire, three in the Netherlands, one in Spain, two in Portugal, two in Mauritania and three in Ghana. As ever, birds that wintered in the rest of the British Isles passed through first, followed by French winterers, Iberian birds and then Ghanaian birds, with the white-flagged Mauritanian birds coming through last in late May–June. Sightings of colour-ringed Sanderling can be reported via animaltrack.org.

Plate 58. Three leg-flagged Sanderling at Sorobaidh Bay, Tiree on 6 April 2017, involving a yellow-flagged bird ringed on the Waddenzee in the Netherlands flanked by two green-flagged birds ringed in southwest Iceland (see text). © *Richard Whitson*

Oystercatchers: Oystercatchers are present all year-round on the Scottish west coast but largest groups appear in spring as birds return from more southerly wintering sites and others pass on through up to Iceland. This spring, after the first returning colour-ringed bird was spotted on Tiree in February, a concerted effort was made to look for colour-ringed birds in the spring flocks on the island to see whether they were merely passing through or whether they stayed to breed. Eight different colour-ringed

Plate 59. Oystercatcher XN (yellow ring) at The Reef, Tiree on 17 April 2017, ringed at Sandymount Strand, Dublin, Ireland on 22 November 2014. © *John Bowler*

Oystercatchers were recorded on Tiree in February–May 2017 of which six had been ringed in winter in the Dublin Bay area since November 2014 and two had been ringed in Wales, including one at Bangor Harbour, Gwynedd on 19 January 2014 and the other at the Gann Estuary, Pembrokeshire on 14 March 2016. One of the Irish birds was only seen in late February but the rest remained until at least the end of March with most remaining and clearly breeding on the island in April and May. Another Dublin Bay Oystercatcher, **AC,** was observed at Daliburgh Beach, South Uist on 25 May 2017 by Ian Thompson. The Irish Oystercatchers were ringed by the "Wader Colour Ring Project" managed by Birdwatch Ireland and Dublin Port and sightings should be sent to: dublinbaybirds@birdwatchireland.ie.

Black-tailed Godwits: Stop-over flocks of passage Black-tailed Godwits have become an increasingly notable feature of recent springs on the west coast and again as many of these birds are individually colour-ringed they present an exciting opportunity to find more about the life stories of marked birds (see *SB* 36:242–245). Northerly winds in late April 2017 resulted in huge flocks dropping off along the west coast including a Scottish record count of 2,270 on Tiree on 25 April of which 1,750 were in a single flock at Kilmoluaig! Examination of the flocks resulted in 31 individually colour-ringed birds being identified on the island from ringing locations in Iceland, Scotland (Montrose Basin), southern and eastern England, France and Portugal. More surprisingly, two of the birds had been observed in previous springs on Tiree, including a Montrose Basin bird ringed in September 2007 and an Icelandic bird ringed at Siglufjordur, north Iceland in July 2011, that were both also seen on Tiree in April 2013. Unlike Sanderling, Black-tailed Godwits appear to be more opportunistic in their choice of spring staging sites on the west coast. Please send sightings of colour-ringed birds to Jenny Gill j.gill@uea.ac.uk .

Plate 60. Black-tailed Godwits at Loch an Eilein, Tiree on 27 April 2017 including red over yellow (left tarsus) lime over orange (right tarsus), ringed at Árnessýsla, Southern Iceland on 5 June 2003. © *John Bowler*

Guillemots - Canna RG, Bob Swann: 2017 was another busy year for the Canna Ringing Group with 355 fully-grown seabirds and 2,042 seabird chicks being ringed and 1,197 fully-grown birds re-trapped backed in the colony. The main species ringed is Guillemot and amongst the large numbers of adults re-trapped were two birds originally ringed as chicks in 1978, making them 39 years old - a new UK longevity record.

Canna guillemots faced some very poor breeding seasons particularly in 2005–2008, when few chicks fledged and those that did fledge had very low pre-fledging weights. Very few chicks from these years have been re-trapped back on the island as breeders. Evidence from the 2009–2012 cohorts suggests that recruitment rates are now showing a marked improvement, completely unprecedented in the case of the 2011 cohort. This is likely to be due to an improvement in survival rates of immature birds and plenty of space in the colonies for recruiting birds.

This autumn four Canna Guillemots have been shot in waters off the Faeroe Islands. In the early years of our study, such recoveries were quite regular. In fact, up to 2004 we had received 70 recoveries of shot birds from the Faeroes, but none since. We had hoped that this additional source of mortality to our Canna Guillemots was a thing of the past, so it is disappointing to see that it is happening again. It did lead to a few tweets from the Faeroes deploring the fact that this was happening again.

Seabirds on the Treshnish Isles, Mull: Robin Ward reports that the Treshnish Isles Auk Ringing Group (TIARG) processed a total of 1,386 seabirds on the islands in June 2017 including 1,001 that were newly ringed. Of 339 Storm Petrels trapped on the island of Lunga in June 2017, 103 were re-traps from previous years and 15 were controls of birds ringed elsewhere. Data are not yet in on where the 15 controls had been ringed but 18 birds controlled by TIARG in June 2016 included recoveries from Sanda Island off Kintyre, Eilean An Taighe in the Western Isles, Eilean nan Ron, Priest Island and Faraid Head in Highland, the Isle of May and Fife Ness in Fife, Eyemouth in the Borders, Hartlepool in Cleveland, the Calf of Man off the Isle of Man, Wooltack Point and Strumble Head in Pembrokeshire and Ballyreagh in County Londonderry. These controls give some idea of where the Treshnish Storm Petrels travel to and notably the Strumble Head bird was caught one day shy of 22 years since ringing!

House Sparrows on Uist: Ian Thompson, Yvonne Benting and Bill Neil have been colour-ringing House Sparrows in Askernish, South Uist since 2011 - see btoringing.blogspot.co.uk/2017/11/the-barra-sparra.html. The species is notoriously sedentary in the UK but detailed work by the Uist team has revealed movements of individual birds to the southern tip of South Uist at Glendale (11 km) and north up the long island chain to Balranald in North Uist (46 km). Even more remarkably, in November 2017 the team re-trapped a bird that had been ringed by Mark Oksien at Garrygall, Barra on 18 September 2017, whilst on 27 November 2017 Bruce Taylor located colour-ringed bird **O54** in his garden at Brevig, Barra, which had been ringed in Askernish on 7 November 2017. Concrete proof that House Sparrows can find ways to cross the sea between islands. Records of colour-ringed House Sparrows in the Outer Hebrides can be posted at www.outerhebridesbirds.org.uk.

Autumn/winter 2017

Passage waders - the Norwegian connection: Little Stints are scarce enough as autumn passage migrants on the west coast, so to find a colour-ringed bird was a prize indeed for Tristan ap Rheinallt. Tristan found his bird **6TE** (yellow ring) on 2 Oct 2017 at Loch Ordais, Lewis. **6TE** had been ringed on 11 September 2017 as a 1CY bird at Makkevika, Giske, Møre & Romsdal, Norway (62° 30'N–006° 01'E). The Norway–Hebrides connection for passage waders was further illustrated by two 1CY Bar-tailed Godwits on Tiree. Leg-flagged bird **PCE** ringed on 9 September 2017 at Makkevika, Norway was at Balinoe, Tiree just 17 days later on 26 September 2017, whilst leg-flagged bird **PEE** ringed at Makkevika, Norway on 26 September 2017 was photographed at Gott Bay, Tiree on 21 October 2017 by Toby Green. These records followed leg-flagged 1CY bird **PAS** ringed at Makkevika, Norway on 7 October 2016, which appeared at Balephetrish Bay, Tiree on 2

Plate 61. House Sparrow O54 (white ring) at Brevig, Barra on 27 November 2017, ringed at Askernish, South Uist on 7 November 2017. © *Bruce Taylor*

Plate 62. Leg-flagged Bar-tailed Godwit PCE (yellow flag) at Balinoe, Tiree on 26 September 2017, ringed at Makkevika, Norway on 9 September 2017. © *John Bowler*

Plate 63 . Leg-flagged Bar-tailed Godwit PEE (yellow flag) at Gott Bay, Tiree on 21 October 2017, ringed at Makkevika, Norway on 26 September 2017. © *Toby Green*

December 2016. Interestingly, despite small numbers of Bar-tailed Godwits wintering on Tiree, none of the birds were seen subsequently and it would seem that these Norwegian-ringed birds were all using the Hebrides as staging areas before heading further south for the winter. Details of these Norwegian-ringed waders were kindly supplied by Kjell Mork Soot kjellmorksoot@fugler.com who oversees their re-sightings.

Greenland Barnacle Geese: 52 Greenland Barnacle Geese were newly ringed with uniquely-coded darvic leg rings at Ruaig, Tiree on 2 March 2017 by Carl Mitchell, WWT to investigate site-fidelity and longevity. All but six of these birds have been re-sighted since ringing, including **SST**, which was seen by Morgan Vaughan on Oronsay, Colonsay on 26 March 2017 before reappearing on Tiree on 6 April 2017. No fewer than 16 of these birds were observed on Islay in October 2017 by Steve Percival, of which at least nine have since returned to Tiree this winter, highlighting the fact that many Barnacle Geese appear to head down to Islay upon arrival in October before returning north to spend the rest of the winter on Tiree. Also recorded on Tiree so far this winter were 23 other birds that were ringed on Tiree in March 2017, 15 that were ringed on Islay, seven that were ringed at Balnakeil, Durness, Sutherland and one, **IXA**, which was ringed as an adult on the Inishkea Islands, County Mayo, Ireland in April 2000. Please send colour-ring sightings of Greenland Barnacle Geese to: steve.percival@ecologyconsult.co.uk

Danish-ringed Glaucous Gull: Ringing recoveries of Glaucous Gulls are precious few in Scotland, so colour-ringed bird **VBXP** that Bruce Taylor found at Ardveenish, Barra on 16 November 2017 and remained on the island well into December, caused much interest. Unlike the few other Scottish Glaucous Gull ringing recoveries, which have mostly involved birds ringed on Bear Island, Norway, **VBXP** was ringed in its first winter on 25 February 2017 at Gilleleje Havn, near Copenhagen, Denmark and was the first Scottish recovery of this species from Denmark.

Plate 64. Glaucous Gull VBXP (yellow ring) at Ardveenish, Barra on 16 November 2017, ringed at Gilleleje Havn, near Copenhagen, Denmark on 25 February 2017. © *Bruce Taylor*

Welsh Manx Shearwater: The huge flocks of Manx Shearwaters that feed around the Inner Hebrides in summer are mostly from the massive colony nearby on Rum and from smaller colonies amongst the islands themselves. However, a metal-ringed bird found dead after storms at Machir Bay, Islay by Mike Peacock on 4 September 2017 had been ringed 13 years earlier as a first-year bird on Bardsey Island, Gwynedd, Wales on 5 September 2004.

Rock Doves - University of Oxford, William Smith william.smith@queens.ox.ac.uk: I am an undergraduate biologist studying Rock Doves for my dissertation. Specifically, I am assessing differences between the wild and feral morphs of *Columba livia*, to show whether the *livia/domestica* subspecies are valid. If there are significant differences, this may reveal a conservation issue, in that wild doves are threatened by introgression, much like the Scottish Wildcat. If you are able to help, I would be delighted to hear from you. Firstly, if you are a ringer and could be involved, please let me know and I can outline the data I am interested in, even if there is only a chance of catching a dove during routine ringing. A big thank you to the ringers who are already helping. Secondly, counts and locations of flocks of doves would be very useful, particularly noting any birds with aberrant plumage features. This will help to highlight the threat that feral pigeons might pose to the 'pure' birds. Photographs would be extremely helpful. Once I have larger samples, I will be able to draw conclusions and share these more widely.

Hopefully, you have enjoyed finding out about the activities of the 'north-west' ringing groups and ring-readers. Many thanks to Tristan ap Rheinallt, Yvonne Benting, Jim Dickson, Steve Duffield, Raymond Duncan, Brian Rabbits, William Smith, Bob Swann, Bruce Taylor, Grahame Thompson, Ian Thompson and Robin Ward for their help with this round-up. Please take the time to check birds for rings and colour rings and please report them to the BTO or directly to the ringers in charge of the project using cr-birding.org or the links above. You will be sent fascinating life histories for your birds and will be contributing to vital information on our important bird populations.

Stop Press

Norwegian Blackbird in Argyll: Mike Harrison first noticed a metal ring on an adult male Blackbird in his garden in Connel, Argyll on 21 December 2015, which visited regularly until 8 February 2016. By photographing the ring, he was able to piece together the number as 7476431 of the Stavanger Museum, Norway scheme and reported it accordingly. The same bird appeared again in the garden on 2 February to 6 March 2017, whilst in 2018, it reappeared on 6 January 2018 remaining into February. The bird was ringed on 15 April 2013 about 25 miles SSE of Oslo, Norway. This fascinating record shows that even humble Blackbirds wintering in Scottish gardens can display the same sorts of journeys and site fidelity that we more often associate with waders, gulls and wildfowl.

John Bowler, RSPB Scotland
Email: John.Bowler@rspb.org.uk

Plates 65–66. Norwegian ringed Blackbird, Connel. Argyll, December 2015 and January 2018. © *Mike Harrison*

Plate 67. Black-billed Cuckoo, Dale of Walls, Mainland, Shetland, September 2017. © *Rory Tallack*

Black-billed Cuckoo, Dale of Walls, 18 September 2017 – second record for Shetland

R. TALLACK

Shetland's west mainland was, until April this year, my local patch, and over the last six years I've grown to love birding it, working out the key sites and the best routes around them, and finding a few good birds along the way. Perhaps the best known of the west side sites, and certainly the most productive in terms of rarities, is the Dale of Walls: a long valley which looks westward to Foula, and provides a variety of habitats for migrants.

On 18 September, I wasn't really birding. I was doing my west side WeBS counts, the first of the autumn - a circuit that takes me as far west as Sandness, and loops around to the lochs by the village of Walls. At around the halfway point I pass the Dale of Walls and, if time permits, I always take the opportunity to stop and look around the best areas.

I'd already checked the first of the two main sites within the valley, and I hadn't seen a single migrant, so I wasn't feeling hugely enthusiastic as I pulled up at the houses at the bottom of the road. It was raining, and I was tempted to give it a miss, but after a few moments of deliberation I persuaded myself to check the croft but to leave the burn, which runs westwards to the sea, for another time. I left my waterproofs in the car - I didn't plan to stay outside for long - and walked through several large patches of nettles, pishing at the handful of rose bushes, before crossing into the small field to the east of the houses. Kicking optimistically at loose clumps of dead docks, I made my way towards a small patch of Japanese Knotweed, only a couple of metres square, on its own in the corner of the field. As I approached to within a few feet of it, I heard

something crash through the middle, and saw a glimpse of what I assumed to be a thrush of some sort. But the bird doubled back on itself as it left through the back of the vegetation, and perched, facing me, on a barbed wire fence, literally five metres away.

I'd imagined this moment many times before; over the last few years, I'd convinced myself that the west side was going to deliver something exceptional from across the Atlantic, and an American cuckoo was high on my wish list. But in my head it had never happened like this. It usually began with a fleeting glimpse of one or the other in the back of a tree, followed by a desperate struggle to sort it out before it disappeared. But here it was, just a few feet from me, giving absolutely everything away. It stayed put for what felt like 20–30 seconds - certainly long enough for me come to terms with what I was seeing, fire off a dozen photographs, and admire it again through my bins. Then it flew, but only to the other side of the same field, where it perched up on a fence post. I went around the back of the croft, approaching from the other side, and moved the bird one more time into a sycamore. At this point I remember feeling remarkably relaxed, considering what I'd just seen - the bird seemed settled, it was unlikely to move far in the rain, and a quick scroll through my photographs confirmed that I had more than enough to nail it. I drove a few miles up the road to the quarry at Watsness, the closest place I knew I could get phone reception. It was only at this moment, as I picked up my phone, that I remember the magnitude of the situation finally hitting me. Yes it was rare, but it was also an incredible bird, and one that every Shetland birder needed. My hand was shaking as I scrolled through my contacts for Roger Riddington's number. "Get to the Dale of Walls now! I've got a Black-billed Cuckoo!" I can't remember if anything else was said, but a minute later I was on the phone to Paul Harvey with the same news. Those two have been the most regular companions on my west side forays, and both were soon on their way. Before I put the news out to the world, it occurred to me that I needed to inform the Dale of Walls residents that they were about to be invaded. Fifteen minutes later, and I was back at the quarry fumbling with my phone once again. "BLACK-BILLED CUCKOO around lower croft at Dale of Walls…" I stared at the text for what seemed like ages, my thumb hovering over the send button, before I finally persuaded myself to press it. I returned to the croft and waited…

PVH was first on the scene and, as the next arrivals were likely to be another 15 minutes away, we decided to try to pin it down in order to minimise disturbance. It was pretty much exactly where I'd left it, and provided one frustratingly brief flight view, before disappearing completely. Given its behaviour up until this point, and knowing the fate of most previous records of the species, my main worry was that it had gone to ground, deep in the vegetation, and died. It was a stressful 45 minutes but, as the birders continued to arrive, I finally relocated the cuckoo in a lone willow, 50 m down the burn. With the crowd of 30 or so birders assembled, I moved the bird back up the burn to the croft, where it would have more cover, a better chance to feed, and the observers would be more likely to get good views.

I stayed for another hour, trying to ignore the rain, which had now become annoyingly heavy at times. As the cuckoo stayed deep in Japanese Knotweed, only occasionally giving itself up, it seemed clear to me that my initial views of this bird were going to be the best. Reluctantly, I gave in and left the crowd, to continue the rest of my WeBS counts. Typically, the bird became more visible after I'd left, often seen clambering around in the upper canopy of the knotweed, and managing to feed, mainly on craneflies and their larvae. It was not seen the following day. I'd like to think, having made the journey across the Atlantic, that it's still out there somewhere, but sadly the statistics are stacked against that theory.

Rory Tallack, Shetland
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White-crowned Sparrow on Foula, Shetland, 8 October 2017 – fourth record for Scotland

D. ATHERTON

During a week of strong NW winds and driving rain, birding required a lot of determination and opportunistic use of available shelter. However, the long-staying Isabelline Shrike, an Olive-backed Pipit on 5 October and the appearance of a Hornemann's Arctic Redpoll kept us on our toes.

Sunday dawned, it was beautifully calm and we were keen to make the most of it, so we set off on an early morning 'loop' of Ham. It was barely light when Geoff spotted a bird sat on dried dock stalks, c.30 m away at the foot of a north-facing coastal rocky bank (a favourite haunt of our resident House Sparrows).

Plate 68. White-crowned Sparrow, Foula, Shetland, October 2017. © *Roger Riddington*

Through the gloom, Geoff saw white wing-bars and a crown stripe that caught his interest enough to tell me to get my bins on it. Its small, orange, conical bill with a small, black, beady eye were prominent, so we quickly took a series of record shots before the bird took off and flew out of sight behind Ham yard dyke. We quickly followed but there was no sign of it, so we took a moment to review our grainy shots, and although poor, we felt sure this bird was something 'good'.

Salvation came in the form of Paul Harvey and Roger Riddington heading our way down the burn - you couldn't have scripted it! On their arrival, we discussed what we had seen and showed them our poor record shots. A volley of expletives followed as Paul and Roger looked at the photos, telling us it was an American sparrow, and a very rare one at that! Identification features of various American sparrows were briefly discussed and it was decided that it was time to go and re-find it.

By this time, the morning light conditions were improving by the minute and the atmosphere was super-charged with apprehension, but mainly excitement, as we formed a line to sweep up from the Ham yard towards Ham House. Geoff spotted the bird in a small, shrubby, area before it flew onto the roof of an outbuilding, perching briefly, before returning to the shrubbery where it provided excellent views just ten metres from where we were all stood. There was no need to rush back to the house to consult Sibley, a confident identification of White-crowned Sparrow was made by Paul and Roger.

After the celebratory 'well dones' we headed back to the house to get breakfast, accompanied by a buoyant Paul who strode off to put the news out from the only WiFi spot on the isle.

Breakfast was a rushed affair, then as we stepped out of the house Paul and Roger were gesturing that the sparrow had actually entered our garden. It soon emerged, showing well on the dyke, washing line and fence posts.

Description

Overall the bird looked larger than a House Sparrow with a bunting-like patterned head and its long tail was very obvious in flight and when perched. At times, it raised its rear crown feathers to produce a small crest while the tail was sometimes held semi-cocked and the wings slightly lowered. The head was dominated by broad chestnut-coloured lateral crown stripes contrasting with a grey crown stripe. Fine dark lateral throat stripes. The white eye-ring was interrupted at the rear by a blackish eye-stripe. The nape was a clean Dunnock grey colour. Bill small, conical and orange. Mantle: a tweedy mix of cream, warm brown and dark brown. White wingbars: median covert bar was much smaller than greater covert bar. Underparts: a white-grey with buff flanks and diffuse dark chestnut smudges on flanks. Legs and feet: mid-brown.

With news out, conversation now turned to how visiting birders were going to get to Foula. It can be difficult to get in or out of Foula at any time of the year for varying reasons - but today was Sunday, so no flights or ferry! The irony being that it was a perfect day of weather for all forms of inter-island transport - a rare thing here in Shetland! Luckily, the bird stayed put and the visiting birders, who came in the following day, all got to see it. During the following three days, it showed briefly around Ham, but was becoming increasingly mobile and elusive.

Plate 69. White-crowned Sparrow, Foula, Shetland, October 2017. © *Roger Riddington*

Plate 70. White-crowned Sparrow, Foula, Shetland, October 2017. © *Roger Riddington*

Our thanks must go to Paul and Roger for their year-round support and encouragement and for sharing with us such a fantastic experience with this mega!

Donna Atherton, Ham, Foula, Shetland.
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Postscript

The sparrow was seen at Vidareidi on Faroes on 7 October by Silas Olofson - 345 km from Foula. This was the first record for Faroe but it had departed next day. Photographs suggest it is the same bird. This is interesting as I have long thought that many Nearctic passerine vagrants that turn up in Shetland in autumn initially make landfall to the north-west - Greenland, Iceland or Faroe. That explains why many are found here in lovely calm conditions or light NW.

Paul Harvey

Plate 71. Siberian Blue Robin, North Ronaldsay, Orkney, October 2017. © *Lewis Hooper*

Siberian Blue Robin, North Ronaldsay, Orkney, 8 October 2017 – third Scottish record

T. GALE & L. HOOPER

Sunday 8 October was a day that showed promise from the off, with a light ENE wind and varying amounts of drizzle throughout the day. The morning seemed quiet until a Hornemann's Arctic Redpoll was found in a mixed flock of redpolls. After seeing this and the long-staying Short-toed Lark myself (Lewis Hooper) and Tom Gale were deciding whether to carry on birding, or call it a day, as it began to rain more and was reaching 16:00 hrs. It was Tom's last full day and he was not planning to stay in so we headed to a productive patch of thistles around a derelict house on the south-east side of the island.

Plate 72. The steading. © *Simon Davis*

After a good half-an-hour to an hour of searching through the thistles, we had come up with very little and were heading back to our bikes when a small dark looking bird flew past us. We immediately stopped and looked at each other. Neither of us could even hazard a guess as to what it was which is normally a good indicator to follow-up on the bird and get a better look. It flitted out of view a few times and eventually into the old barn attached to the derelict house as it flapped against the window silhouetted. We watched it for a minute at least trying to figure out what this mysterious bird was as it was trying to get out, and pulling all kinds of weird shapes while doing so, really throwing us as to its identity.

A dark back, pale underparts and bright pink legs were the only features we could go on which narrowed it down, but not enough. It was clearly trying to get out and struggling so I suggested to Tom to go and get it before it did any damage to itself. Tom is an experienced ringer and had bird bags on him so he and I saw no reason why not, not only would it be safer for the bird but finally we could work out what it was. I (Tom) walked through the doorway of the building and towards the bird. As I approached, it continued to struggle against the window so I decided to catch it quickly before it could do itself any harm. I still had no idea what it was, as it was quite dark inside and I had been focused more on catching it. However, just before I caught it, I almost subconsciously registered that its upperparts were not black - they were blue!

The significance of this didn't really sink in until a few moments later when I was staring at it in my hand. After a second or two of complete bewilderment, the penny dropped. "Lewis... it's a male Siberian Blue Robin!" I took it outside to show Lewis before putting it into a bird bag. The pink legs and perfect white underparts we had seen before were confirmed and in the light, its back glowed with a dazzling metallic blue. This sent Lewis and I into a complete frenzy of shock and excitement. Lewis phoned the observatory staff so the bird could be ringed and released as soon as possible.

George Gay (volunteer warden) didn't actually believe Lewis at first since the prospect of finding a male Siberian Blue Robin in an old building seemed so ridiculous. It wasn't long before it was taken back to the observatory to be ringed, allowing the staff and guests to see this incredible bird for themselves. Appropriate measurements were taken, including a fat and muscle score (1,1) and the bird was taken to a nearby crop field to be released. It skulked in the field for a minute or two and then disappeared into the bushes around the observatory Heligoland traps. At a distance, the bird appeared more black and white, which explains how a bright blue bird can go missing so easily. We both were in a state of shock, with hands shaking uncontrollably and still unable to truly fathom what had just happened. I imagine others had similar feelings, with one volunteer reduced to tears. The next morning, a thorough search of the area unfortunately proved unsuccessful and the bird was not seen again.

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Status of Siberian Blue Robin in Scotland

This Eastern Palearctic species breeds from NE Kazakhstan and south central Siberia eastwards through Mongolia and China to E Siberia, Korea and Japan The population is entirely migratory and winters in S China, SE Asia and Indonesia.

There have been three previous records in Britain:

2000 Suffolk: female/first-winter at Minsmere on 23 October

2001 Orkney: first-winter male on North Ronaldsay on 2 October

2011 Shetland: first-winter female, found dead, at Ham, Foula on 1 October

There was also an earlier record of one in the Banquette Valley, Sark, Channel Islands on 27 October 1975. There is one other record from Europe - one at the Ebro Delta, Tarragona, Spain on 18 October 2000.

So, the Northern Isles, and North Ronaldsay in particular, lead the way for this stunning eastern vagrant, with (early) October the most likely period for occurrence.

Plate 73. White-winged Scoter, Belmont Loch, Unst, Shetland, October 2017. © *Jim Nicolson*

White-winged Scoter, Yell & Unst, 16–22 October 2017 – third Scottish record and first for Shetland

D. PRESTON

Early afternoon on 18 October 2017, while checking out wildfowl on my home island of Yell. I became interested in a sleeping *Aythya* duck at the far side of Sand Water, a smallish loch at the north end of Yell. It wasn't immediately obvious what species it was, but thinking that it looked quite interesting, I attached my camera to the scope and waited for it to wake up. After a few minutes, it duly raised its head, and immediately revealed itself as the first-ever Ring-necked Duck (a juvenile male) for the island.

It was while getting some distant record shots of this rare visitor that a lone duck crash-landed on the water just in front of it. Repositioning my scope onto this new arrival, I was surprised to see what appeared to be a juvenile Velvet Scoter. This being a fresh water loch, and having only seen a couple of Velvet Scoters in Shetland previously, I decided to grab a couple of record shots, even though the bird was still quite a distance away. The bird was very active and dived frequently, and after only a couple of minutes on the loch the bird took to the air and headed roughly north-east in the direction of Unst.

It was then that I reviewed the photos on the back of my camera and was shocked to discover a head and bill shape more suited to the American White-winged Scoter *Melanitta deglandi deglandi*. One of the more obvious features was the way you could see straight through the raised nostrils. What's more, the distinctive right-angled shape of the feathering

that White-winged Scoter has leading down the bill was just about visible in my record shots. It had been several years since I had read the excellent article by Martin Garner in his 2008 book *Frontiers in Birding*, on separating the American (*deglandi*) and Asiatic (*stejnegeri*) forms of Velvet Scoter that were only sub-species at the time of writing. But the illustrations in that book had been firmly committed to memory in the vague hope of one day finding my own! Panic started to set in as to the enormity of what had just occurred, and to top it off the bird had now gone missing. I decided to quickly check a couple of neighbouring lochs, but unfortunately the bird appeared to have completely disappeared. The only reasonable option open to me was to double check I wasn't somehow seeing what I wanted to see, so I headed for home to check my *Birding Frontiers*. The article seemed to confirm my first impressions, and the bird really must be a *deglandi* White-winged Scoter.

I knew that if I were correct, a lot of Shetland listers would want to see this first for the isles, never mind the number of visiting birders still here for the autumn. So with any form of White-winged Scoter in Britain being such a mega rarity, I decided to try and get the identification corroborated by posting a photo onto the local Whatsapp grapevine. Nervously, I sent the photo with a simple 'comments welcome'. Thankfully, I didn't have to wait very long, as within a few minutes I started to receive messages and phone calls from highly respected birders confirming the identification. I also learned that some birders were already on their way to look, even though they were aware the bird was seemingly lost, and only a matter of an hour and a half of available daylight left to search a potentially very large area of suitable habitat. This is traditionally a seaduck after all, and Shetland has a lot of coastline!

Later that same evening, I received a very welcome call from one of Unst's most prolific rarity finders, Brydon Thomason, informing me that he had relocated what was presumably the same bird on Belmont Loch at the south of Unst, but as light was fading fast and the bird being distant, absolute confirmation wasn't possible. Much to everyone's relief, the bird was still present the following morning and easily confirmed as the same individual with the identification being confirmed beyond doubt. Some stunning photos were obtained by a variety of local birders. Jim Nicolson in particular seemed to capture all the required features nicely in the photo shown here (Plate 73). Contact with Guillermo Rodriguez (writer of the fascinating web article 'A nice flock of White-winged Scoters') in the following days was very helpful in showing this bird was probably a male. The angular head shape and length of bill are both highly indicative of a male bird, as are the presence of white tips to the greater coverts.

The bird remained faithful to Belmont Loch for the next couple of days, often showing extremely well, until it was last seen on the morning of 22 October. As it turns out, what has proved to be the same individual was actually photographed at the nearby ferry terminal on Unst on 16 October, two days before my sighting, by Norfolk tour group 'Oriole Birding'. Unfortunately for them, they had assumed the bird to be a Velvet Scoter, and thought nothing more of it until the Yell sighting came to light!

Previous records

There have been two previous records in Britain:

First-summer male *deglandi* at Blackdog, North-east Scotland, found on 11 June 2011, and returning most years since.

Adult male possibly of the Asian form *stejnegeri* photographed at Musselburgh, Lothian on 26 December 2014.

Ireland has also recorded an adult male of the Asian form *stejnegeri* in Co. Kerry. It was present over winter 2009/10 and again in March 2011.

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Dougie Preston, Newton Lodge, Burravoe, Yell, Shetland.
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Plate 74. Blackpoll Warbler, Lochmaddy, North Uist, Outer Hebrides, October 2017. © *Brian Rabbitts*

Blackpoll Warbler, Lochmaddy, North Uist, 23 October 2017 – fourth Outer Hebrides record

B. RABBITTS

As readers of this journal will know, 2016 was an outstanding year for North American passerines in the Outer Hebrides with White-crowned Sparrow and Black-billed Cuckoo in the spring (*Scottish Birds* 36: 260–263 and 269–272) and Eastern Kingbird, Yellow-billed Cuckoo and Swainson's Thrush in the autumn (*Scottish Birds* 36: 360–362, 366–369 and 37: 65–66). One that 'got away', however, was a White-throated Sparrow in Lorna Macleod's garden in Lochmaddy, North Uist in October. Although present for virtually the entire month it was only heard or seen briefly by Andrew Stevenson and myself on four occasions. Needless to say this was insufficient to prove the record to the rarities committee. Ironically (see later) White-throated Sparrows are said to often come to investigate if you make pishing sounds.

Fast-forward a year later (23 October) and in the same Lochmaddy garden. The day dawned cloudy with rain later, and as my wife was going off the island I dropped her at the ferry terminal in the late morning. After visiting a local shop I discovered I had left my waterproofs and notebook at home. Although the rain had stopped the sky looked threatening, so it was a toss-up between returning home or doing some birding and hoping it didn't rain. There are a number of good areas in and around the township worth checking for migrants, with the area by the old pier/Lorna's garden being one of them. The rear garden is particularly good, being secluded, and comprising more or less of natural habitat (it is many years now since it has been used for any kind of cultivation). So as fate would have it, I plumped for a visit here. There was very little bird activity as I made my way to the end of the garden but this changed suddenly when a Sparrowhawk flashed through and several species started alarming. One call sounded interesting, although not that of the species of this

article, and this was a cue to put my Audubon Bird Call device into action. Many times I have used this without attracting anything unusual but on this occasion the result was spectacular for instantaneously there came distinctive *chip* calls and a Blackpoll Warbler was in a tree right in front of me! To say I was taken by surprise was an under-statement as I struggled to get my camera out. The camera was on the wrong settings but my record shots were sufficient to confirm my identification. Although not having seen Blackpoll Warbler for a good number of years, the bird was instantly recognisable by its lightly streaked olive-green mantle, yellowish tinge to throat and breast, two prominent white wing bars, white fringes to dark tertials and darkish legs that contrasted noticeably with yellowish feet. After a minute or so the bird moved away and as there was no phone signal I decided to return home and phone the news out.

The weather had changed for the better when I returned in the afternoon. Along with a mere four other observers the bird was active at times, and thankfully behaved in complete contrast to the elusive sparrow. Although it looked healthy enough, David Henshilwood later told me that it was hunched up and immobile for a while when he was watching it. Whatever its fate one can only marvel on its amazing journey to reach our shores. There was no sign of the warbler the next day, and the only bird of note was a Blue Tit (a very unusual visitor to the Uists) seen by Terry Easter. After the disappointment of the White-throated Sparrow, it was just as a result of a fortunate visit to the same garden that another North American passerine was discovered.

There have been three other Blackpoll Warblers seen in the Outer Hebrides. The first was seen by Bob Wemyss on Lewis in 1996 (fourth record for Scotland and the first outwith Shetland) and the other two by Andrew Stevenson (who has now seen three) on South Uist in 2003 and 2005.

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Plates 75–78. Blackpoll Warbler, Lochmaddy, North Uist, Outer Hebrides, October 2017. © *Brian Rabbitts*

Plate 79. Pied-billed Grebe, Loch of Spiggie, Mainland, Shetland, February 2018. © *Roger Riddington*

Pied-billed Grebe, Loch of Spiggie, Shetland, November 2017 – first record for Shetland

R. RIDDINGTON

By the time the clocks went back, the 2017 Shetland autumn appeared to be meandering quietly and aimlessly towards winter. The wind swung into the southwest on 24 October and remained westerly for weeks. Mind you, resident birders could hardly complain, given that the headline acts of the previous six weeks had all been from the west - Shetland's second Black-billed Cuckoo and White-crowned Sparrow, and its first White-winged Scoter.

Plate 80. Pied-billed Grebe, Loch Spiggie, Mainland, Shetland, February 2018. © *Roger Riddington*

Saturday 4 November dawned bright, with moderate SW winds and occasional heavy showers. Given the lack of spark in the preceding days, I didn't anticipate spending a full day in the field and left the house around 10:00 hrs with little intention of leaving the driving seat. I figured that a lap of the local watery places would probably take me nicely up to lunchtime.

And in the first hour there was little to get too excited about. A family group of three Barnacle Geese at Fleck (two adults and a juvenile, one of the adults being colour-ringed) seemed a good candidate for the birding highlight of the day, although they would surely prove to be from the Svalbard population, where virtually all of Shetland's passage Barnacle Geese originate from.

I pulled up at the south end of the Loch of Spiggie, the largest freshwater loch in the south mainland, around 11:45 hrs. Scanning over the loch revealed several groups of Mallards, a winter-plumaged Slavonian Grebe and very few *Aythyas*, which was disappointing. I took the scope from the passenger seat and scanned over the Setter Marsh area. Everything seemed entirely peaceful, and then a Little Grebe swimming past a drake Mallard sent a kick of

adrenaline through me, as palpable as a shock from an electric fence: 'why isn't that a Pied-billed Grebe?! Surely that bird is really big…' Suddenly, I was properly awake. I cranked up the zoom on the scope, and concentrated. Fifteen minutes of 'is it? isn't it?' ensued, dithering which later seemed inexplicable, yet the bird wasn't that close, and at some angles it looked just like a Little Grebe. And it was diving constantly, which didn't help. Eventually, I'd been through the key criteria multiple times, and it surely ticked all the boxes - it wasn't the most obvious of Pied-billed Grebes, but it was one!

I spoke to Rory Tallack, my stepson, on the phone, since I knew he wasn't far away and might appreciate coming to see a first for Shetland with the kids before the news went out. He decided he would do just that, so I had a bit longer to enjoy the bird, as well as the opportunity for a second opinion before the news went out to the world. The bird seemed wholly settled and worked its way across to the near edge of the loch so that in good light and at a range of 150 m I had some nice views. Rory and the girls duly arrived. One-year-old Malin was predictably unimpressed; three-year-old Thea was disappointed at how far away it looked through her prized, bright green Bresser 6x21s; but daddy said he was OK with it as a Pied-billed Grebe.

Even though the light was good, it was just too far away for even the biggest lenses in Shetland. I alternated between disgiscoping, my Canon 400 mm with a converter, and a notebook and pencil - none of which worked particularly well. The bird's size - the first thing I'd noticed - and shape were distinctive, but so was its behaviour. It was surprisingly aggressive, bossing the Slavonian Grebe and pretty much all the ducks it encountered, including Mallards. When alarmed, it did the classic Pied-billed Grebe 'submarine' routine, sinking its body beneath the water, leaving just the head and tail (or just the head) visible - and then either disappearing from view completely or resurfacing.

All in all, it was a hugely enjoyable Saturday afternoon, all the more so for being wholly unexpected. The bird was my 400th species for Shetland, 25 years and a few months after stepping off the north boat in April 1992. Two postscripts to report. Perhaps unsurprisingly, given how at home the bird seemed, it later emerged that it was not newly arrived - it had been photographed, as a presumed Little Grebe, two days previously. In addition, to add a gloss to the day's notebook, a subsequent e-mail from Steve Percival revealed that the Barnacle Goose family was not from Svalbard but was the first confirmed record of Greenland barnies in Shetland for maybe 30 years. The same group had been photographed a few days before, in Foula, by Geoff and Donna Atherton, with whom I'd enjoyed the Foula White-crowned Sparrow four weekends earlier.

Roger Riddington, Spindrift, Eastshore, Virkie, Shetland ZE3 9JS.
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Plate 81. Pied-billed Grebe, Loch of Spiggie, Mainland, Shetland, November 2017. © *Roger Riddington*

Plate 82. Red-eyed Vireo, Deerness, Orkney, October 2017. © *Christine Hall*

Red-eyed Vireo, Deerness, 8 October 2017 – second record for Orkney

A. LEITCH

Due to a promising forecast for migrants the night before, I had decided to go ringing at East Denwick plantation in Deerness before our planned 'work' trip to Copinsay mid-morning. However, on arrival at the site in the gloom of dawn, the drizzle and breezy conditions meant I had to abort my original plan to set some mist-nets, so I had a quick look around and walked along the coast looking for migrants, it seemed pretty quiet and I got soaked for my efforts. The highlight of my searches was a Goldcrest!

We went over to Copinsay mid-morning, staying until mid-afternoon, and like Deerness it initially seemed quiet on the migrant front, with only a Chiffchaff noted around the buildings. The weather was improving around lunchtime and it was also noticeable that a few more migrants had arrived or come out from what little cover there is on the island: two Lesser Whitethroats, three Common Redstarts, three Robins, two Blackcaps, three Chaffinches, a Siskin, a Dunnock and a Goldcrest... it was quite exciting really, and what you hope for while birding during autumn migration periods.

I was already thinking about going back to East Denwick when we got back to Mainland as conditions were favourable for mist-netting. I asked my colleagues if anyone fancied coming along for a few hours and a couple said they would (and I bet they are glad they did, there are also some who wished they probably had!)

We arrived at East Denwick plantation and I erected the usual 60-foot net near my parking

spot and then had a walk about. It seemed very quiet, despite what was on Copinsay, just a few miles away. I did not put any more nets up and decided to wait and see what we caught. The first three birds were re-traps from previous ringing sessions: a Goldcrest, a Chiffchaff and a Wren. I had heard a Reed Bunting call and decided to put a tape-lure on, as they can respond quite well. It was as I approached the net that a bird in the bottom shelf caught my eye.

I could not quite believe what I was looking at - I knew straight away what I thought it was... a Red-eyed Vireo! However, once extracted from the net, given a quick check over in the hand, and bagged I started wondering about other vireos and non-breeding/first-year plumages they may have ... do they look similar to Red-eyed Vireo? To be honest I was not 100% sure as it is not a group I am that familiar with, but I had seen one before in the UK, in Suffolk, and I was confident this bird was the very same.

I had been away in Kazakhstan when the first for Orkney was discovered, in 2009, so this bird more than made up for that miss. I went back to the car and played the game 'guess what we have just caught?' We would have been there all night if I had waited for the right answer, so I took the bird out to ring and measure it and once more asked the question, eventually one of my colleagues got it right. The bird was processed, photographed and news was put out. It was released into the plantation, where it was seen briefly in the field for a few minutes before disappearing never to be seen again I believe, though we did not know that at the time.

When I got home I was on 'cloud nine', looking forward to uploading an image or two of my bird of the day onto the local birding social media sites. Only then did I find out it was not even bird of the day on Orkney! A stonking male Siberian Blue Robin had been caught on North Ronaldsay around about the same time... oh well, mustn't grumble!

I went back to East Denwick the next day as conditions were still favourable and had a few nets up, but there was no sign of the bird, though we caught a few new migrants, along with some re-traps. To my knowledge, nobody other than those present when the bird was caught saw it. A net round to remember, that's for sure!

Description

Upperparts & tail: olive green. **Underparts:** white, unmarked, flanks had a light green/yellow wash. **Head:** grey crown, with thin black edges either side. Dirty white supercilium that started from the base of the upper mandible and flared well behind the eye. Dark eye-stripe, with white crescent under the eye. White chin/throat. Ear-coverts were olive green. **Bill:** stout and dark horn upper/lower mandible, with the exception of the base to the lower mandible which was pale. There was a slight hook on the tip of the upper mandible. **Iris:** dull, reddish-brown. **Legs:** blue-grey. **Ring number:** Y504412, Red-eyed Vireo **Age:** first-year **Wing:** 78 mm **Weight:** 21.4 g **Fat score:** 2

Alan Leitch, Orkney
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Plate 83. Red-eyed Vireo, Deerness, Orkney, October 2017. © *Christine Hall*

Plate 84. Red-eyed Vireo, Deerness, Orkney, October 2017. © *Alan Leitch*

Status of Red-eyed Vireo in Scotland

This Nearctic species breeds across much of North America from the Northwest Territories of Canada south to northern Oregon, South Dakota and Texas eastwards to Newfoundland and the Atlantic seaboard south to northern Florida [other subspecies breed in South America]. The entire North American population is migratory and winters in South America from Columbia to Brazil.

This is the most regular Nearctic passerine vagrant to Britain with 137 accepted records to the end of 2016, with 17 of these in Scotland:

1985 Caithness: one, Wick, 13–16 October
1988 Caithness: one, Thurso, 8 November
1988 Outer Hebrides: one, Newton Plantation, North Uist, 1–7 October
1991 Lothian: one, East Barns, 13–14 October
1992 Argyll: one Arinagour, Coll, 3 October
2000 Outer Hebrides: one, Stornoway Woods, Lewis, 21 October
2003 Outer Hebrides: one, Aird Mhor Plantation, Barra, 5–7 October
2005 Outer Hebrides: one, Liniclate, Benbecula, 30 September
2008 Argyll: one, Caolas, Tiree, 9 October
2009 Orkney: one, Langskaill Plantation, Mainland, 2 October
2010 Outer Hebrides: two, North Locheynort, South Uist, 10–12 October
2011 Outer Hebrides: first-winter, Brevig, Barra, 20–30 September
2012 Shetland: first-winter, Norwick, Unst, 12–15 September
2012 Outer Hebrides: one, Stornoway, Lewis, 9 October
2013 Fair Isle: one, Easter Lother, 6 October
2014 Shetland: one, Sumburgh, Mainland, 25 September.

There have been a further 61 accepted records from Ireland to the end of 2014. The first British record was as recent as 1962 when one was discovered on St Agnes, Isles of Scilly on 4 October. Remarkably it was joined by a second the following day. All subsequent records have also been in autumn, with a peak in the first half of October, with Scottish records showing the same peak.

There is a marked south-west bias to records in Britain and Ireland, with three-quarters of British records from Scilly, Cornwall and Devon alone. There are scattered records north of this including several on the east coast of England. The SW vector of displacement for this species is also seen in Scotland with 10 of the 17 Scottish records (58.8%) on the Outer and Inner Hebrides.

The earliest Scottish/British find date is 12 September (Shetland 2012) and that in Ireland is 5 September (Cape Clear, Co. Cork 2004). The latest find date is the 1988 Thurso bird, with the remaining Scottish records found between 20 September and 21 October. The most seen in a year in Scotland has been two, in both 2010 and 2012. There is a trend for increasing discovery of this species in Scotland (5 in 2000s, 7 in 2010s to date) which may simply reflect increased observer coverage of the Hebrides and Northern Isles in recent years.

Scottish Bird Sightings

1 October to 31 December 2017

S.L. RIVERS

Records in Scottish Bird Sightings are published for interest only. All records are subject to acceptance by the relevant records committee.

The following abbreviations for recording areas are used: Angus & Dundee - A&D; Argyll - Arg; Ayrshire - Ayrs; Borders - Bord; Caithness - Caith; Dumfries & Galloway D&G; Highland - High; Lothian - Loth; Moray & Nairn - M&N; North-East Scotland - NES; Outer Hebrides - OH; Perth & Kinross - P&K; Shetland - Shet; Upper Forth - UF.

The period was notable for a good selection of vagrant Canada Geese on Islay, arrivals of Arctic Redpolls, Parrot Crossbills, and Hawfinches, mostly on the Northern Isles, a remarkable Nearctic/Eastern Palearctic rarity double on Orkney, and white-winged gulls numbers were better than for several years.

Bewick's Swan: two flew south over Kirkcaldy (Fife) on 27 October; four flew north past Barns Ness (Loth) on 4 December, and one was at Caerlaverock WWT Reserve (D&G) on 11–12 December, and nearby at Ruthwell (D&G) on 12th. **Taiga Bean Goose:** the Slamannan flock (UF) built up from 2 October, with a peak count of 214 birds in early November. Elsewhere, nine flew over North Queensferry (Fife) on 22 October, 29 flew east there on 29 October, and two west on 15 November. **Tundra Bean Goose:** one was near Elie (Fife) on 11 November; two at North Sandwick, Yell (Shet) on 15th, one near Alness (High) on 15–16th; one at Inverurie (NES) on 17 November, and one at Loch of Skene (NES) on 19 December. **Snow Goose:** a white-phase bird was at Borve, Berneray (OH) from 4 October to 2018: two were at Gollanfield (High) on 13 October; one flew over Gordon (Bord) on 25 October; one was at Cotehill Loch (NES) on 24 November, one at Slains Pool (NES) on 26th and Collieston (NES) on 29th; one near Thurso (Caith) on 29 November; one at Loch of Strathbeg RSPB Reserve (NES) on 20 December, then on the Ythan Estuary and at Meikle Loch (NES) on 2 December. Two blue-phase birds were at Findhorn Bay (M&N) on 10 October, with one still on 11th, and two were near South Alloa (UF) on 28–31 October. **Todd's Canada Goose (form *interior*):** one was at Udale Bay RSPB Reserve (High) on 12–14 October; at least four at various sites on Islay (Arg) from 15 October to mid-December; singles were at Loch Eye (High) on 3 November, near Kildary (High) on 4th, and near Tarbat Ness (High) on 10 November, and near Alturlie Point (High) on 16–20 December. **Lesser Canada Goose (form *parvipes*):** one was at Kilchoman, Islay (Arg) on 19 October and still reported to end October. **Cackling Canada Goose (form *hutchinsii*):** up to four were present on Islay (Arg) from 15 October to 2 December; one at Blackness (Loth) in October, and one near Gretna (D&G) on 16 November. **Red-breasted Goose:** two were at Loch of Skene (NES) on 17–20 October, with one still on 21st, one at Collieston (NES) on 27 October, Whinnyfold (NES) on 1 November, Collieston again on 5 November, and one near Elgin (M&N) on 6 December.

Plate 85. American Wigeon, Balkenna, Ayrshire, November 2017. © *Angus Hogg*

American Wigeon: single drakes were at Aeliodair, North Uist (OH) on 2 October, with two there on 3rd; at Loch Eye (High) on 7–20 October, and 3–19 November; at Loch Gilp (Arg) on 9–29 October; at Loch Eaval, North Uist on 10th; at Loch Grogarry, North Uist on 10 October to 5 November; at Udale Bay RSPB Reserve (High) from 20 October to 2 December, with two there on 3rd; at Oban Trumisgarry, North Uist on 21 October to 19 November; near Inverness (High) on 5 November to 31 December; at Loch of Strathbeg RSPB Reserve (NES) on 8–12 November; one was at Loch Aileodair again on 24 November to 2018; at Portmahomack (High) on 3 December; at Tain (High) on 3rd and 24–31 December; one near Turnberry (Ayrs) on 10–12 December, and one at Caol (High) on 28–31 December. A possible female was at Udale Bay

RSPB Reserve on 21 November. **Green-winged Teal**: single drakes were on North Ronaldsay (Ork) from 1 October to 15 November; at Loch Gruinart RSPB Reserve, Islay (Arg) on 7 November; at Lossiemouth (M&N) on 12–18 November; at Loch of Strathbeg RSPB Reserve (NES) on 15 November; at Loch Sandary, North Uist (OH) from 26 November to 30 December; at Loch Flemington (High/M&N) on 28 November to 18 December; at Loch a' Phuill, Tiree (Arg) on 10–31 December: at Alturlie Point (High) on 18 December; at Loch Spynie (M&N) on 29th, and at Loch of Skaill, Mainland (Ork) on 31 December.

Ring-necked Duck: a first-winter was still at Loch a'Phuill, Tiree (Arg) to 5 November; a female/juvenile at Uyeasund, Unst (Shet) on 5–14 October; a drake at Loch Branahuie, Lewis (OH) on 5th and 21 October; a juvenile at Gutcher, Yell (shet) on 18–30 October; a drake at Loch of Skaill, Mainland (Ork) on 18 October; a drake at Milton Loch (D&G) from 29 October to 27 December; a drake at Loch Watten (Caith) on 15 November; a drake off Acharacle Pier (High) on 19 November, and one at Carlingwark Loch (D&G) on 26–27 December. **Ferruginous Duck:** one was at Linlithgow Loch (Loth) on 5 October, with presumabl the same at Gartmorn Dam, Alloa (UF) on 12–27 October - the third for the area.

King Eider: single drakes were off Whiteness Head, near Fort George (High) from 1 November to 1 December, and off Wester Quarff, Mainland (Shet) on 4 November to 15 December. **Surf Scoter:** the adult drake was off Musselburgh (Loth) from September to 31 December, with two on 15 December; one still in Lunan Bay (A&D) to 7 October; a drake in the Sound of Taransay, Harris (OH) from 3 October to 2 November; a juvenile was off Baltasound, Unst (Shet) on 15–30 October; a drake was off Ruddons Point/Lower Largo (Fife) from 2 November to 21 December; a drake was in Hascosay Sound. Fetlar (Shet) on 7 November; a drake off Cockenzie (Loth) on 11 November; a drake off Gullane (Loth) on 22–23 November; a drake was off Kinshaldy (Fife) on 4 December, with two there on 11th, and two drakes were off Kirkwall, Mainland (Ork) on 29 December. **White-winged Scoter:** a female/juvenile was at Loch of Belmont, Unst on 18–22 October - a first for Shetland. **Smew:** single redheads were at Drumpellier CP (Clyde) on 22 October; at Loch Gelly (Fife) on 30 October; at Balgavies Loch (A&D) on 4 November; at Loch of Kinnordy RSPB Reserve (A&D) on 5–26 November, with a drake there on 31 December; at Loch Leven, Kinross (P&K) on 15 November, with a drake there on 3–10 December; a redhead on Barr Loch, Lochwinnoch RSPB Reserve (Clyde) from 19 November to 1 December; at Lochore Meadows CP (Fife) on 4–31 December, and at Castle Semple Loch (Clyde) on 6–22 December.

White-billed Diver: singles were off Embo (High) on 4–13 October; near Sandwick, Mainland (Shet) on 16 October; off Mull Head, Papa Westray (Ork) on 23 October, with two there on 26th, three on 29th, and four on 30th, and off St Abbs Head (Bord) on 29 October. One flew past Torness Point (Loth) on 2 November; one off Houton Head, Mainland (Ork) on 2 November; one was off Papa Westray again and one flew past the Isle of May on 6 November; one passed Hamars Ness, Fetlar (Shet) on 7th; one was off Eyemouth (Bord) on 10th; off Kirkabister, Mainland (Shet) on 13th; and past North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 29 November. Singles were off Peterhead (NES) on 10 December, and at St Margaret's Hope, South Ronaldsay and Burray (Ork) from 10 December. **Fea's/Desertas Petrel:** one flew past North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 18 October, and two on 30 October. **Balearic Shearwater:** one flew past North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 17 October; one was off Tarbat Ness (High) on 19–22nd and 27 October.

Bittern: singles were at Loch of Kinnordy RSPB Reserve (A&D) from 20 October into 2018; at Yetholm Loch (Bord) on 25 October, and at Loch Spynie (M&N) on 2–19 November. **Cattle Egret:** one was near West Freugh Airfield (D&G) from 25 November to 5 December. **Little Egret:** generally under-reported, but at least 16 were at Caerlaverock WWT Reserve (D&G) in October, and one was on Barra (OH) on 1 November. **Great White Egret:** singles were at Griminish, North Uist (OH) on 9–10 October; over Girdle Ness, Aberdeen (NES) on 10 October; at Loch Hosta, North Uist on 11th; at Loch Grogarry, North Uist on 20–21st; at Caerlaverock WWT Reserve (D&G) from 24 October to 21 December; at Dervaig, Mull (Arg) on 4 November, and at Wigtown (D&G) on 8–26 November. **Glossy Ibis:** one was at Kinloch, Isle of Rhum (High) on 14–17 October, with it, or another, near Salen, Isle of Mull (Arg) on 21–31 December; one at Tankerness, Mainland (Ork) on 26 December, and near Quoyangry, South Ronaldsay (Ork) on 27th, and one at Cornaigmore, Tiree (Arg) on 28–31 December. **Pied-billed Grebe:** the returning adult male was still at Loch Feorlin, near Lochgilphead (Arg) to 6 December, and one was at Loch of Spiggie, Mainland (Shet) from 4 November into 2018 - the first Shetland record.

Honey-buzzard: one flew over the Isle of May on 5 October. **Northern Harrier:** an adult male was at Cottasgarth RSPB Reserve,

Plate 86. Glossy Ibis, Rum, Highland, October 2017. © *Sean Morris*

Mainland (Ork) on 13 October. **Rough-legged Buzzard:** one was at Loch of Strathbeg RSPB Reserve on 26 November, and one near Coral Beaches, Skye (High) on 28 December. **Hobby:** singles were noted at Pitlessie (Fife) on 1 October, and Cunningsburgh, Mainland and Garths Ness, Mainland (both Shet) on 8 October. **Gyrfalcon:** a grey-morph bird was at Reiss, near Wick (Caith) on 16 October. **Crane:** one was still at Loch of Hillwell, Mainland (Shet) to 2 October, and one at Quendale, Mainland (Shet) to 3 October. One was at Borve, Berneray (OH) from 3 October into 2018; two flew over the Ythan Estuary (NES) on 5 October; one was at Sumburgh, Mainland (Shet) on 5th, and at Loch of Brow/Spiggie, Mainland (Shet) on 5–9th, with two there on 10–17 October.

American Golden Plover: a juvenile was at Esha Ness, Mainland (Shet) on 3–5 October; at West Gerinish, South Uist (OH) on 18–21 October; at Baleshare, North Uist (OH) on 22–27th; at Port Logan (D&G) from 25 October to 10 November; near Eoligarry, Barra (OH) on 28–29 October; at Boisdale, South Uist on 3 November to 1 December; at West Gerinish again on 11 November; at Baleshare again from 18–21 November. **Semipalmated Sandpiper:** one was at Balgarva, South Uist (OH) on 5–9 October. **White-rumped Sandpiper:** a juvenile was at Aird an Runair, North Uist (OH) on 5 October; at Balgarva, South Uist (OH) on 7–9 October, and one at East Haven (A&D) on 6–9 November. **Buff-breasted Sandpiper:** one was on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 9–16 October. **Grey Phalarope:** one flew past Aird, Tiree (Arg) on 2 October; two passed Uisead Point, Machrihanish (Arg) on 2nd and one on 5 October; one was in Dunnet Bay (Caith) on 2nd; one off Foula (Shet) on 3rd; one at Loch Katrine (UF) on 29–30 October was only the third for the recording area; one at North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 10 November; one off St Abb's Head (Bord) on 12 November; one at Inverallochy (NES) on 14th; one at Boddam Harbour (NES) on 18 November, and one in Dunnet Bay again on 8 December.

Pomarine Skua: about 95 reported in October, with a peak of 21 in Broadford Bay, Skye on 2 October; at least eight in November with a high count of three off Lochmaddy, North Uist (OH) on 10th. **Long-tailed Skua:** one flew north past Sheigra (High) on 3 October; one passed Embo (High) on 16th, and one passed Aird, Tiree (Arg) on 17 October. **Ivory Gull:** one was on Papa Westray (Ork) on 30 October. **Sabine's Gull:** four juveniles in Broadford Bay, Skye (High) on 2 October, with another on 17 October; one off Esha Ness, Mainland (Shet) on 5 October; a juvenile off Maidens (Ayrs) on 7th; three off Tiree (Arg) on 17th; a juvenile off Lochmaddy, North Uist (OH) on 10 November, and two juveniles in Broadford Bay again on 12 November. **Bonaparte's Gull:** an adult was at Largs (Ayrs) on 17–27 November. **Ring-billed Gull:** a second-winter was at Dundonnell (High) on 16–18 October; one at Stoer (High) on 22 October, and an adult at Strathclyde CP (Clyde) from 23 December into 2018. **Mediterranean Gull:** very few reports away from the Firth of Forth, but one was at Alturlie Point (High) on 1 December. **Yellow-legged Gull:** one was at Balgray Reservoir (Clyde) on 27 December. **Iceland Gull:** about 18 in October, virtually all in the north and west, with a high count of two on Sanday (Ork) on 2nd; at least 60 in November, with a peak of four at Mallaig (High) on 29th, and over 90 in December, with a peak of six at Lerwick, Mainland (Shet) on 15–16th and 21st. **Kumlien's Gull:** a juvenile was on Sanday (Ork) on 3–7 October, and one at Thurso (Caith) on 7 December. **Kumlien's/Thayer's Gull:** a bird on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 22–25 November was of one of these forms. **Glaucous Gull:** at least 25 in October, all in the north and west, with a high count of three on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 21st; over 110 in November, with a peak of 22 on Fair Isle on 22nd, and over 100 in December, with peak counts of six at Dunnet Head (Caith) on 8th, at Scatness, Mainland (Shet) on 9th and on Fair Isle on 17th. **Black Tern:** singles were Dunnet Bay (Caith), at Arbroath (A&D), and at Skateraw (Loth) on 2 October; off Barns Ness (Loth) on 4 October; at Eswick, Mainland (Shet) on 5th, at Dunbar on 5th & 7th, and past Scoughall (Loth) on 6th, 7th, 9th and 10 October.

Turtle Dove: singles were at Symbister, Whalsay and Skaw, Whalsay (Shet) on 1 October, and at Lerwick, Mainland (Shet) on 25 October. **Snowy Owl:** one was on Eday (Ork) from at least 18 November into late December. **Roller:** one was still at Balnakeil (High) to 3 October. **Red-eyed Vireo:** one was at East Denwick Plantation, Mainland (Ork) on 8 October - second for Orkney. **Isabelline Shrike:** two remained on Foula (Shet) to 3 October, with one still to 12 October. **Red-backed Shrike:** singles were at Fladdabister, Mainland (Shet) and at Girdle Ness, Aberdeen (NES) on 1 October; on Sanday (Ork) on 5th, and at East Denwick, Mainland (Ork) on 22 October. **Great Grey Shrike:** in October there were 18 on Shetland, one on Fair Isle on 19–20th, at least one on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 20th and 24–26th; one at Aberlady Bay (Loth) on 30 October; one on Papa Westray (Ork) on 30 October to 1 November; one at Baltasound, Unst (Shet) on 5 November; at Grantown-on-Spey (High) on 23 November, and near Farr (High) in mid-December. '**Steppe Grey Shrike**': one was at Vaivoe, Whalsay (Shet) on 14–31 October. **Woodchat Shrike:** one near Crianlarich (UF) on 13 October was the first for the recording area.

Firecrest: seven were on Shetland in October; two were at Nethybridge (High) on 5 October, and singles on Fair Isle on 20th and 23rd; at Grindigar, Mainland (Ork) on 26 October to 4 November; at Hestily, South Ronaldsay (Ork) on 31 October; at Holm, Mainland (Ork) on 22–27 November and 21–25 December; at Stornoway, Lewis (OH) on 28 November to 21 December; at Brevig, Barra (OH) on 29 November; at Loch of Strathbeg RSPB Reserve (NES) on 3–22 December, and in Glasgow (Clyde) on 11–31 December. **Woodlark:** one was near Everland, Fetlar (Shet) on 23 October. **Shore Lark:** two were on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 22nd; one on Fair Isle on 22–25 October, with three on 24th; three at Scoughall (Loth) on 4 November; one at Burghead (M&N) on 14 November; one at Ben Lawers (P&K) on 17 November - first for the region; one at Embo (High) on 9 December, and two at Coul Links, Loch Fleet (High) from 10 December into 2018. **Short-toed Lark:** one was at Aith, Mainland (Shet) on 1–2 October, and one on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 6–14 October.

Greenish Warbler: singles were at Esha Ness, Mainland (Shet) on 1 October, and at Tresta, Fetlar (Shet) on 2 October. **Pallas's Warbler:** singles were at St Abb's Head (Bord) on 18 October; on Out Skerries (Shet) on 19th; at Halligarth, Unst (Shet) on 20th; on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 20th, with two there on 21st, and one on 25th; at Scatness, Mainland (Shet) on 21st; at Creadyknowe, Whalsay (Shet) on 22nd, and on Out Skerries (Shet) on 23 October. **Yellow-browed Warbler:** fewer than in recent few autumns, but still over 225 recorded on the Northern and Western Isles in October, with peak counts of six on Fetlar (Shet) on 3rd and on Fair Isle on 10th, and nine on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 20th. Elsewhere there were at least 65, with individuals noted south to

Plate 87. Great Grey Shrike, Dale of Walls, Shetland, October 2017. © *Peter Garrity*

Borders and Dumfries & Galloway, and a high count of four at Collieston (NES) on 20 October. In November there were three on Barra (OH) on 1st, with two still to 5th; two at Kergord, Mainland (Shet) on 2nd, one at Balemartin, North Uist (OH) on 2nd, and one at Lochmaddy, North Uist on 4th. **Hume's Warbler:** one was at Ham, Foula (Shet) on 22–26 October. **Radde's Warbler:** singles were at Dale of Walls, Mainland (Shet) on 8 October, and at Barns Ness (Loth) on 16 October. **Dusky Warbler:** singles were at Gulberwick, Mainland (Shet) on 6–7 October; on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 10–18th and 26 October; on Fair Isle on 19–22nd; at Hoswick, Mainland (Shet) on 25th and 29th, and at Melby, Mainland and Kergord, Mainland (both Shet) on 26 October. **Barred Warbler:** at least 20 in October, mostly on the Northern Isles, except for singles at Kilminning, Fife Ness (Fife) on 1–14 October, at Castlebay, Barra (OH) on 14–17 October and at Girdle Ness, Aberdeen (NES) on 24 October. **Pallas's Grasshopper Warbler:** one was at North Collafirth, Mainland (Shet) on 1 October. **Booted Warbler:** singles were still on Foula (Shet) on 1 October; at Hoswick, Mainland (Shet) on 5–8th, and on Bressay (Shet) on 6 October. **Blyth's Reed Warbler:** singles were at Sandside Bay, Mainland (Ork) on 4 October; on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 7th; at Sandwick, Mainland (Shet) on 8–18th; at Halligarth, Unst (Shet) on 11th, and at Fladdabister, Mainland (Shet) on 13 October. **Marsh Warbler:** singles were on Fair Isle on 1 October; at Quendale, Mainland (Shet) on 10–11 October, and at Lerwick, Mainland (Shet) on 16th and 20 October.

Rose-coloured Starling: one was at Garths Ness, Mainland (Shet) on 8 October. **White's Thrush:** one was on Fair Isle on 7 October. **Black-throated Thrush:** one was on Fair Isle on 23 October. **Siberian Blue Robin:** an adult male was on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 6 October - the third Scottish record. **Thrush Nightingale:** one was at Burn of Sandgarth, Mainland (Shet) on 8–15 October. **Bluethroat:** on Shetland singles were still at Walls, Mainland to 2 October; at Gloup, Yell and Breckon, Yell on 1 October; at Saxa Vord, Unst on 2 October; at Sumburgh, Mainland on 3rd; at Hoswick, Unst on 6th and 9th; at Haroldswick, Unst on 9–15th; at Wester Quarff, Mainland on 11th, and on Out Skerries on 22 October. Elsewhere one was on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 9th, 12th, 18th & 20 October, and one on Fair Isle on 16–17 October. **Siberian Rubythroat:** a female was on Bressay (Shet) on 5 October. **Red-flanked Bluetail:** a first-winter was at North Roe, Mainland on 5–16 October; one on Fair Isle on 18–19 October, and one at Wick (Caith) on 19 October. **Red-breasted Flycatcher:** at least 20 were on Shetland in October, one on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 1–26 October, and one at Airdmhor, Barra (OH) on 17–20 October. One was still at Kergord, Mainland (Shet) on 2 November and one at Halligarth, Unst (Shet) on 3 November. **Pied Wheatear:** one was on Out Skerries (Shet) on 26 October. **Siberian Stonechat:** singles at Hoswick, Mainland (Shet) on 8 October; at Sandwick, Mainland (Shet) on 8–27 October; on Fair Isle on 9th and 16th, and on Sanday (Ork) on at least 24 October.

Yellow Wagtail: one was on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 24 October; one at Kilmory, Rhum (High) on 2 November, and a possible eastern race bird at Carinish, North Uist (OH) on 11 October. **Richard's Pipit:** singles were on Sanday (Ork) on 7 October; on Fair Isle on 9th, 12–17th and 20–21 October; at Geosetter, Mainland (Shet) on 25th; one found dead on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 26th, and one at Dunbar (Loth) on 17–18 December, with it, or another, at Barns Ness (Loth) on 18 December. **Olive-backed Pipit:** singles were on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 1 October; at Dale of Walls, Mainland (Shet) on 2 October; at Easter Skeld, Mainland and Kergord, Mainland (both Shet) on 3rd; on Foula (Shet) on 5th; at Uyeasound, Unst (Shet) on 7th; two near Funzie, Fetlar (Shet) on 12th; one at Baltasound, Unst on 16–19th; on North Ronaldsay on 22–26th; on Foula again on 26th, and on Fair Isle on 26 October. **Pechora Pipit:** one was on Foula (Shet) on 8 October. **Red-throated Pipit:** one was still at Skaw, Unst (Shet) to 8 October; one on Fair Isle still to 10 October, with others on 12–17th, 19th and 24th October. **Water Pipit:** two were at Barns Ness (Loth) on 23 October, with one still from 28 October to 21 December; one at Aberlady Bay (Loth) on 25 October; near Dunbar (Loth) on 4 November and 27 December; one at Gretna (D&G) on 16 November, and one at Skateraw (Loth) on 10 December. **Buff-bellied Pipit:** one was at Grutness, Mainland (Shet) on 4–6 October.

Arctic Redpoll: birds not assigned to the forms below included one at Sumburgh Head, Mainland (Shet) on 28 November, and four in Stromness, Mainland (Ork) on 15 December. **Hornemann's Arctic Redpoll:** at least 20 were on Shetland in October, one on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 8–10th and 24 October; two on Fair Isle on 23rd, with one still on 24th, and one on 30th. One was at Halligarth/Baltasound, Unst (Shet) on 25 December. **Coues's Arctic Redpoll:** at least seven were on Shetland in October; one was at Girdle Ness, Aberdeen (NES) on 18 October; one on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 21 October; singles were at Norwick, Unst and

Skaw, Unst on 23 November. **Parrot Crossbill:** five were at Baltasound, Unst (Shet) on 2 October, with at least 19 on Shetland on 3rd, 20+ on 4–6th, up to ten on 7–8th, four on 10th, and one still at Lerwick, Mainland to13 October. Elsewhere, one was at Binscarth (Ork) on 6th; two at Finstown, Mainland (Ork) on 7 October; two at Hestily, South Ronaldsay (Ork) on 22nd, and a female at Langass Wood, North Uist (OH) on 23 October. **Common Rosefinch:** in October there were at least 13 on Shetland, at least three on Fair Isle, and three on the Outer Hebrides. Elsewhere one was at St Abb's Head (Bord) on 21 October. A late record involved one in Stromness, Mainland (Ork) on 16 December. **Hawfinch:** ones and twos were widespread across the Northern and Western Isles in October, but in November apart from nine in west Scotland most reports were from SE Scotland. At least four were in Upper Forth, 24 in Lothian and ten in Borders, with higher counts of seven at Barnton, Edinburgh (Loth) on 3 November, five at Mortonhall, Edinburgh on 4 November, and seven at Coldstream (Bord) on 25 November. Six were still at Coldstream on 3 December.

Plate 88. Parrot Crossbill, Sand, Shetland, October 2017. © *Peter Garrity*

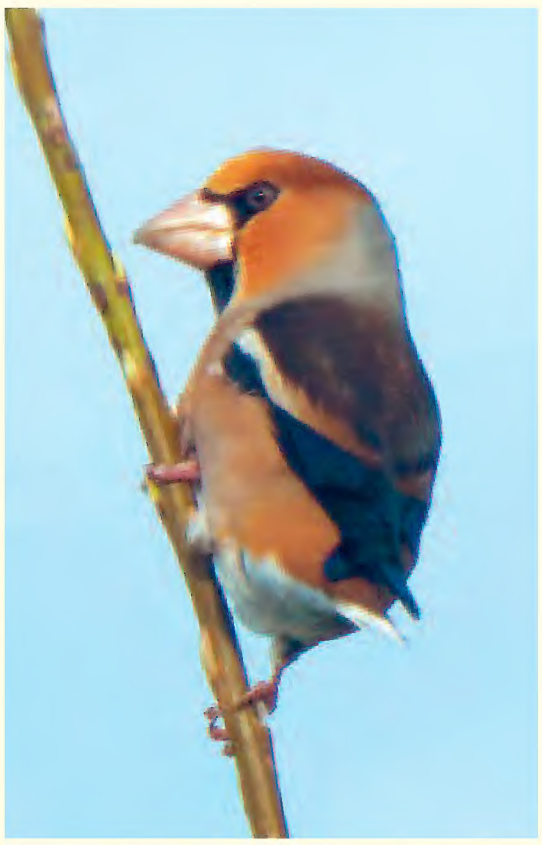

Plate 89. Hawfinch, Tiree, Argyll, November 2017. © *John Bowler*

Snow Bunting: a good showing, mostly on the Northern and Western Isles - with over 500 in October, including high counts of 84 on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 26th and 85 at Butt of Lewis, Lewis (OH) on 27th. Over 500 in November, with peak counts of 120 on North Ronaldsay on 19th and 74 at Askernish, South Uist (OH) on 29th. Over 1,100 in December, with peak counts of 200 at Yesnaby, Mainland (Ork) on 17th and 350 at Borve, Berneray (OH) on 18th. **Lapland Bunting:** a good showing, with at least 80 in October, mostly on the Northern and Western Isles, including higher counts of 13 on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 7 October and 13 on Fair Isle on 13 October. Elsewhere singles were on Tiree (Arg) on 6th and 18–19 October; at Scoughall (Loth) on 7 October; at Scrabster (Caith) on 11th; near Machir Bay, Islay (Arg) and at Skateraw (Loth) on 23 October. At least 20 noted in November, mostly on the Western Isles, with peaks of five at Kilaulay, South Uist on 27th and at The Range, South Uist on 28 November. At least 25 were reported in December, on the Western Isles and SE Scotland, with a peak count of 10 at Wormiston (Fife) on 23 December. **White-crowned Sparrow:** a first-winter was at Ham, Foula on 8–11 October - the first Shetland record. **Rustic Bunting:** all were on Shetland - singles still at Dale of Walls, Mainland to 1 October; at Melby, Mainland to 2 October, and at Cunningsburgh, Mainland to 9 October; on Foula on 1 October, and at Lower Voe, Mainland on 4 October. **Little Bunting:** during October there were up to 40 on Shetland, and at least six on Fair Isle. Last were singles at Sand, Mainland (Shet) on 2–4 November and at Baltasound, Unst (Shet) on 4–5 November. The only record elsewhere was one at Dry Burn (Loth) on 20–21 October - third for Lothian. **Black-headed Bunting:** a female/first-winter was on Fair Isle on 11–19 October. **Blackpoll Warbler:** one was at Lochmaddy, North Uist (OH) on 23 October - the second for Scotland.

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Plate 90. Our annual trip to Shetland from Sheffield is always eventful and October 2017 was no exception, albeit the worst weather we had ever encountered. During a break in the rain, we traveled to Sandwick beach to see the recently discovered putative *longipes* Oystercatcher and on returning inland a short distance a shout of "harrier"rang out from in the car. We jumped out of the car to see this ring-tail Hen Harrier hunting over stubble fields and disturbing a large flock of Starlings. I managed to capture a number of images of what was our first Hen Harrier for Shetland, having seen both Pallid and Marsh Harriers in previous years.

Equipment: Canon 1DX, Canon 500mm f4 mk2 lens + 1.4x converter, Manual, ISO 250, shutter 1/1600, aperture f5.6.

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